REFORMED TRUTH

FOR

FILIPINO CHURCHES

EDGARDO M. ALDE

REFORMED TRUTH FOR FILIPINO CHURCHES

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By Edgardo M. Alde

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Reformed Truth for Filipino Churches: A Call for Biblical Faithfulness and Reformation

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Dedication

To the Filipino pastors, young and old, who labor faithfully in the vineyard of the Lord—
May your hearts be continually anchored in the gospel of grace, and may your pulpits never cease to proclaim Christ and Him crucified.

To the local churches across the Philippines—
May you grow deep in doctrine, strong in faith, and steadfast in your love for the truth. You are not forgotten in the sight of God.

To those who long for biblical preaching and Christ-centered worship—
May this work help stir a hunger in your soul for what is real, eternal, and God-glorifying.

To my family Rose, Jeru, and Jay—
Your prayers, patience, and quiet strength have been my constant support in ministry and writing. This work would not be possible without you.

Above all, to the Lord Jesus Christ—
The Head of the Church, the Shepherd of every true pastor, and the glory of every faithful ministry—this book is for You, from You, and through You.

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Abstract

This book, Reformed Truth for Filipino Churches, has to call our local churches back to a deep and faithful commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as understood through the lens of Reformed theology. The title does not intend to create a division between "Reformed truth" and "biblical truth," but to affirm that Reformed theology is a faithful expression of the biblical gospel—centered on God's sovereignty, the sufficiency of Christ, and the authority of Scripture.

In a time of doctrinal confusion and shallow spirituality, this book addresses key truths recovered during the Protestant Reformation and applies them pastorally to the Filipino context. It emphasizes Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, and the doctrines of grace, urging pastors and churches to embrace sound doctrine, Christ-exalting preaching, and biblical worship.

Combining theological reflection with pastoral concern, this work offers a timely appeal for biblical faithfulness, spiritual renewal, and ecclesiastical reformation—for the glory of God, and for the health of the church in the Philippines.

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Preface

The message of the Reformation did not end in the 16th century. Its cry—Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Soli Deo Gloria—continues to echo today, calling every generation and every church back to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This book, The Reformed Truth for Filipino Churches, is written as a humble contribution to that ongoing call. It is both a plea and a pastoral exhortation to the churches in the Philippines to rediscover the theological richness and spiritual depth of the Reformation.

As a pastor who has served in the ministry for decades, I have seen firsthand the growing confusion in doctrine, the rise of man-centered preaching, and the decline of biblical authority in many pulpits. There is much zeal, but not always according to knowledge. There is sincerity, but not always rooted in truth. And in the absence of strong biblical foundations, churches become vulnerable to shallow teachings, pragmatic approaches, and emotionalism that lacks true gospel substance.

This book does not aim to introduce something new. Rather, it seeks to recover what has been lost or forgotten—the glorious truths of God's sovereign grace,

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the authority of Scripture, the centrality of Christ, and the necessity of true conversion and sanctification. These are not Western ideas. They are biblical truths that transcend cultures and must be embraced by every church that desires to remain faithful to her Lord.

I write this for fellow pastors, church leaders, theology students, and believers who long for solid teaching and Christ-exalting worship. My hope is that through these pages, the Filipino church would be reawakened to the doctrines that gave birth to true gospel preaching, reverent worship, and enduring faith.

May the Spirit of God stir a new hunger in us—not for what is popular, but for what is true. And may this little work serve its purpose: to bring the Filipino church back to the feet of Christ, in joyful submission to His Word, for the glory of God alone.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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Introduction

Where Is the Voice of the Reformation Today?

The Silence of Reformed Preaching in Modern Pulpits

It is truly a joy and a remarkable sight to see people today holding fast to the Word of God and boldly preaching it. Despite many hardships, oppositions, and obstacles that come with proclaiming the truth, there are still those who remain committed to this sacred task. Preaching is not an easy calling—it is a serious and weighty responsibility that the Lord Himself has laid upon our shoulders.

However, we must also acknowledge a sobering reality: while many religious leaders today proclaim messages from pulpits and platforms, the motive and content behind those messages vary greatly. We do not presume to judge anyone's heart—for only the Lord truly knows the intentions of men—but we must ask an important question:

Is the preaching we hear truly beneficial for the soul—leading people to eternal life with Christ?

In a time when so many declare themselves to be preachers, we must discern:

- Is Christ exalted at the center of the message?
- Is the gospel being proclaimed in truth and power, or have other agendas taken its place?

True preaching must point people not merely to moral improvement or religious activity, but to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Anything less falls short of the calling we have received.

The Silence Must End: A Call to Reformed Gospel Preaching

One of the deepest burdens I carry in this endeavor is the urgent need to awaken the pulpit once again to the power and purity of the gospel. In far too many churches today, there is a quietness—almost a silence—when it comes to proclaiming the full counsel of God, especially the doctrines that the Reformation restored to the heart of the Church.

While sermons are preached Sunday after Sunday, they often lack the depth, clarity, and Christ-centeredness that Scripture demands.

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Dear reader, our passion is Christ—His person, His work, and His glory at Calvary. We believe that true preaching must exalt Him, not merely mention Him. Gospel preaching must not be reduced to moral exhortations or vague encouragements; it must center on the cross, the resurrection, and the sovereign grace of God in Christ.

Let us return to what the Scriptures truly say. Let us open our hearts and our mouths to proclaim Christ among the many. Let the truth of the gospel not remain in the mind of the preacher alone but be planted deeply in the hearts of all God's people.

This is the essence of true gospel proclamation: that Christ is known, loved, and exalted—so that the people of God may not only know Him but glorify His name with their lives.

What Does It Mean to Be Silent in the Truth?

To be silent in the truth is not merely the absence of speech—it is the absence of conviction, courage, and Christ-centered proclamation in a world that opposes the gospel. I say this with a heavy heart. I have observed, time and again, that many churches today seem unable—or unwilling—to take a firm stand for the truth, especially when such a stand may cost them popularity, comfort, or even their very lives.

When the gospel demands confrontation with the prevailing sins of culture, many choose silence. When biblical truth collides with the trends of the age, many pulpits retreat rather than stand. There is fear that speaking boldly about Christ and His sovereign grace might invite ridicule, rejection, or even persecution.

Therefore, the Church—called to be a pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)—has too often become a passive observer in the face of error.

But to live for Christ is to live for the gospel—and to live for the gospel is to live dangerously in a world that hates the light.

Yet here is the astonishing grace of God: even in the midst of compromise, even when the church falters, God continues to save. He raises up true converts—not through the appeal of worldly fashion, but through the unchanging power of His Word.

Dear reader, the call to faithfulness has not changed. To be silent is to surrender the battle. But to speak the truth, even at great cost, is to walk the path of Christ Himself. Let us not fear what the world may do, for we have already died with Christ, and our life is hidden in Him (Colossians 3:3). Let us then live not for ease, but for eternity.

Where the Blame Truly Lies: The Need for Doctrinally Grounded Leadership

We cannot place the full blame on church members if they are unaware or unrooted in the deeper truths of Scripture. In many cases, they are simply recipients of what has been taught—or left untaught—from the pulpit. The greater accountability falls on the shoulders of spiritual leaders who have not immersed themselves in sound doctrine and faithful exposition of God's Word.

The church can only absorb what is offered to them. If preaching remains shallow, vague, or misdirected, then the spiritual nourishment of God's people suffers. When the pulpit fails to proclaim the central truths of Scripture—especially those that point to Christ's redemptive work—sermons become mere superficial homilies. These may entertain, motivate, or morally uplift, but they lack the power to transform.

Rather than equipping the church for spiritual warfare, many messages focus solely on human welfare—material needs, emotional uplift, or personal success. These are not inherently wrong, but when they become the dominant theme, they say in the weightier matters of sin, grace, redemption, and sanctification.

Dear brethren, the gospel is not about self-fulfillment; it is about God's fulfillment of His redemptive purpose in Christ. The pulpit must reclaim its prophetic voice—not to tickle ears but to awaken hearts. Leaders must return to the discipline of studying, rightly dividing, and boldly declaring the Word of truth.

Only then will the Church be built up, grounded in doctrine, and prepared to stand firm in the battle for the faith.

Returning to the Spirit of the Reformers: A Call to Gospel-Centered Courage

Let us turn our gaze back to the 16th century—to the faithful men God raised up in a dark hour of church history. Men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, William Farel, John Knox, and others stood as beacons of light when the gospel was obscured by corruption, superstition, and man-made traditions.

They were not men of shallow conviction or mere intellectual curiosity; they were men of deep biblical courage, willing to suffer and even die for the sake of truth. They did not seek personal advancement, comfort, or popularity. Instead, they forsook self-interest—often facing imprisonment, exile, and execution.

They knew that the truth of the gospel—salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—was worth every cost. To them, fidelity to Christ outweighed the threat of the stake or sword.

This kind of gospel-centered courage is what the church needs today.

The chasm between modern pulpits and the Reformation's bold witness must be bridged. We must

recover the clarity, conviction, and Christ-centered focus that marked the Reformers' preaching and writing.

As more are awakening to the truths of Scripture, we must also be equipped—not merely to know, but to restore what has decayed in the life of the church.

Much of today's church culture drifts farther from Christ, prioritizing entertainment, human-centered messages, or social approval over the unchanging Word. But the answer is not innovation—it is restoration.

The church must be reformed once again according to God's Word. And that begins with leaders and laypeople embracing the gospel courage of the Reformers—not to idolize them, but to imitate their devotion to Christ.

Today, we are invited to take a deeper look at the enduring reality behind the Reformation and rediscover its significance in our postmodern world. In a time marked by confusion, shifting values, and growing disregard for absolute truth, it is more urgent than ever to return to the gospel—the truth that sparked the Protestant Reformation.

As a nation often referred to as "the only Christian nation in the Far East," we must take a sober look at ourselves. Does this title truly reflect the spiritual reality within our churches? Are we faithful stewards of the gospel entrusted to us?

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The answer lies in our willingness to be grounded—not in tradition, culture, or religiosity—but in the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. The church must be built on Christ alone, and through that foundation, we can bring true light to a darkened world.

This task is not for everyone, but for those truly called by God to shepherd His people and faithfully preach His Word. They must rise with boldness, clarity, and compassion, standing firm for the truth amid opposition and indifference.

The Reformation reminds us: gospel truth is worth contending for, and the church's health depends on its unwavering commitment to sound doctrine and Christ-exalting preaching.

Let us now begin to earnestly dig into this truth—not casually, but deeply and prayerfully. This is a journey not only of knowledge but of heart. With humility, open Bibles, and a hunger for God's glory, let us pursue the Reformed truth that draws us back to Christ and His all-sufficient grace.

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CHAPTER ONE

DEAF EARS AND FORGOTTEN FOUNDATION

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The Reformation and the Power of the Word

The history of religion is not only a chronicle of devotion but also of intense struggle—not simply over earthly power, kingship, or influence, but for the sake of truth. These conflicts were not driven by personal ambition, but by a deep longing to preserve the purity of the gospel. Though often hidden behind external events, this struggle reveals a divine force at work. Truth possesses a power of its own—one that stirs the heart, awakens the mind, and challenges institutions—often through the most unlikely people.

Among these instruments of truth was Martin Luther, a central figure in the Protestant Reformation. Church historian Justo L. González notes that Luther struggled for years under the weight of guilt, uncertainty, and a religious system rooted in human merit and works-righteousness.[1]González writes, "Martin Luther has been described in many ways. Some portray him as the ogre who destroyed the unity of the church…"

Yet in 1513, while teaching on the book of Romans at the University of Wittenberg, Luther encountered a turning point. As he studied Romans 1, he came upon the verse that would ignite the fire of the Reformation: "The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). This verse, illuminated by the Spirit, became to him the doorway to

[1] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity,* vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 14–16.

spiritual freedom and the foundation of his theology. He would later describe the experience as like "entering paradise through open gates."

This moment not only transformed Luther's life—it sparked a reformation that echoed across history and around the globe. It marked a return to the gospel: the righteousness of God received by faith alone, apart from works. This is the very truth that must remain the heartbeat of the church's calling today.

Luther's personal experiences—his inner turmoil, fear of divine judgment, and yearning for assurance—were not mere psychological episodes. They were divinely orchestrated events that led him to the rediscovery of the gospel. As Romans 2:4 reminds us, "Do you not know that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" In Luther's case, it was God's providence that led him to grasp the doctrine of justification by faith.

The study of church history is invaluable. It enables us to trace the unfolding of doctrine and witness God's redemptive hand in time. As Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." But while historical understanding is helpful, it cannot bring transformation. That belongs to the Holy Spirit, who alone convicts and regenerates hearts. Jesus said, "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13), and Paul affirmed that "the

natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God… because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Each of us has an appointed moment, determined by God, when His grace breaks through. Acts 17:26–27 teaches that God "determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God… and find Him." Salvation, then, is not the result of human initiative but of divine calling. And when that calling comes, it is through the Word—"the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16)—that the gospel is made clear and effective.

The Word of God points us ultimately to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said, "The Scriptures… bear witness about Me" (John 5:39). At the cross, where He bore our sins and satisfied divine justice (Isaiah 53:5–6; 2 Corinthians 5:21), all of history and theology converge. Here we see not abstract truths, but the living Christ—crucified and risen—who stands at the center of it all.

Luther's reformation began with this rediscovery of Scripture. Through the Word, he was confronted, convicted, and converted. And so must the church today walk the same path—not remaining passive or content with tradition or superficial knowledge, but pursuing deep, Spirit-led transformation through the living Word.

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We must immerse ourselves in Scripture—not as cold doctrine, but as life-giving truth that restores, revives, and reforms. The Word must shape our beliefs, guide our actions, and saturate our worship. Only then will the church reflect genuine spiritual renewal.

The Reformation and the Ancient Faith

The Reformers of the 16th century did not invent a new theology; rather, they recovered the faith once delivered to the saints. Their unwavering commitment to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Christ was a continuation of ancient Christian orthodoxy. One of the earliest theological battles that shaped Christian doctrine was over the nature of Christ—specifically, His full divinity.

This came to a head in the early 4th century with the Arian controversy. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD), under the influence of faithful church leaders and even with the political involvement of Emperor Constantine, affirmed the term homoousios[2]—that Christ is of the same essence as the Father. This word became a cornerstone of true Christian confession, guarding the church against the heresy that claimed Christ was a created, inferior being.

Consequently, the doctrine of Christ's full divinity is not a product of medieval or Reformation thought—it is a

[2]Robert Hughes, *Rome* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), 181.

foundational truth rooted in the early church. The Reformers stood in continuity with this heritage. Their insistence on sola Scriptura and Solus Christus was a recovery, not a reinvention, of apostolic truth. They rightly understood that the church must be centered on the person of Christ—fully God and fully man, the only hope of salvation.

The Reformation, therefore, was not merely a protest against ecclesiastical corruption.[3]It was a theological rescue mission—a return to the authority of Christ and His Word. It was about bringing the church back under the lordship of Jesus, not as a mere religious leader, but as God incarnate, worthy of all worship and obedience.

Why Many Remain Deaf to the Call of Reformation

But why does the message of the Reformation fall on deaf ears today? Why do many Christians remain content with shallow preaching, entertainment-based worship, and man-centered messages? The fundamental issue is a departure from Scripture. When the authority of God's Word is abandoned, the gospel becomes diluted, and preaching loses its power.

True exposition is not about clever outlines or emotional delivery—it is rooted in the preacher's submission to the authority of Scripture. Without this submission, sermons become doctrinally vague and disconnected from the

[3] Ibid., p.182.

gospel power that once transformed nations. Sadly, many preachers today fail to see the unity and depth of Scripture. They may quote verses, but if Christ is not the heart of their message, then they are not proclaiming the gospel.

This failure leaves congregations spiritually starved. The call to return to Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and to the glory of God alone is too often ignored because the Word is no longer central. When the pulpit no longer trembles under the weight of God's truth, the church drifts into confusion, complacency, and compromise.

"He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear", God's Sovereignty in Hearing the Word

Scripture teaches that even the ability to truly hear the Word is a gift from God. Faith comes by hearing, yes—but hearing comes through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). In John 8:43–47, Jesus said to the Jews, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word." True hearing belongs only to those whom God has called. As Acts 16:14 records, "The Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

This is the sovereign initiative of God. He not only shows mercy to whom He wills—He also hardens (Romans 9:18). Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the Lord. Likewise, Isaiah was told, "Keep on hearing, but

do not understand…" (Isaiah 6:9–10). The problem is never with the message—it lies in the spiritual blindness of man and the divine judgment that sometimes withholds understanding.

Man's depravity further compounds this problem. By nature, he is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), blind, deaf, and unable to receive the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). Only the Spirit can awaken the heart. That's why Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). This is not a generic call—it's a spiritual truth: only those whom God has given ears will hear. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice… and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Our task, then, is not to make people hear—but to faithfully proclaim the Word. God alone opens hearts. And His elect will hear and follow.

The Danger of Outward Appearance and Consumer-Driven Christianity

What truly marks the church of Christ in this age of showmanship and consumer appeal? Too often, churches are measured by appearance: grand buildings, impressive programs, charismatic speakers, and warm welcomes. But are these the true signs of Christ's presence?

According to Scripture, the true church is marked by faithfulness to the Word, pure preaching of the gospel, right administration of the sacraments, and biblical

discipline. It is Christ—not culture—that must be at the center. A church can have every outward success and still be spiritually bankrupt if Christ is not exalted.

Programs and hospitality are not wrong in themselves. But when they replace the gospel, the church loses its identity. The true church does not entertain—it proclaims. It does not seek to please consumers but to glorify God. It does not dilute truth for relevance but proclaims it with love and boldness.

The question is not whether a church is growing numerically or impressing crowds. The question is this: Is Christ crucified being faithfully preached? Are disciples being formed under His lordship? Is God's glory exalted above all else? If not, then however appealing it may appear, such a church is in danger of losing its soul.

In his book, James Boice quotes a statement from the Cambridge Declaration protest, saying that the Christian faith has become worldly in perspective and vague in practice—mirroring the culture around it. As a result, it has lost its deep significance, traded true freedom for personal choice and replaced biblical sanctification. Christ's finished work is no longer at the center of the believer's will.[4]

[4]James Montgomery Boice, *What Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 88.

If such practices are truly being carried out by those who claim to be Christians, then it reveals a serious compromise in their faith. It means they are opening their hearts to the corruption of sin, allowing its stain to penetrate deeply into their spiritual lives. This is not just a personal issue—it has far-reaching consequences. When sin is tolerated and discernment is lacking, the entire life and witness of the church are affected. The result is often tragic: the church becomes spiritually weak, insensitive to the leading of the Lord, and loses its ability to stand as a distinct and holy people.

Instead of being a beacon of light to a dark world, the church begins to mirror the world's values, thus forfeiting its calling to be "the salt of the earth" and "a city set on a hill." This drift is nothing less than spiritual ignorance—a rejection of God's Word that leads to conformity to the patterns of the world rather than transformation by the renewing of the mind.

That is why it is absolutely essential that the gospel be preached with faithfulness and clarity. Church leaders must be men who are truly enlightened by the Lord—men who understand the depth of God's truth and who are not afraid to proclaim Christ boldly, calling the church back to its true foundation: the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Like what I have mentioned earlier, It has been many centuries—since the faithful martyrs of the Christian faith, both from the early church and the 16th-century

Reformation, stood boldly against the heresies of their time. These men and women were willing to suffer, bleed, and even die for the sake of preserving the truth of the gospel. They did not waver in the face of persecution because they knew that the purity of Christ's doctrine was worth defending at all costs.

And yet today, we find ourselves in a time when many seem blind and numb to that very truth. The deep convictions that once stirred the hearts of believers to stand firm have now grown cold in many churches. It is as though people have become immune to the power and urgency of the gospel. There is little evidence of true conviction—perhaps even a loss of understanding altogether. The truths that once ignited reform and revival now seem to pass by unnoticed, unheeded, and unvalued.

If this spiritual apathy continues—if the church continues to drift without recognizing the seriousness of the hour—then we must acknowledge the painful reality: Christianity, at least in its visible form, is in danger. The church may maintain its outward forms and traditions, but without the inner flame of truth and conviction, it becomes powerless, vulnerable, and easily swayed by error.

This is precisely why we must return to the foundations laid by the saints who have gone before us. Their courage, their theology, and their unwavering devotion to Christ must not be forgotten. Rather, their legacy should

drive us to recover the clarity, depth, and boldness of biblical Christianity in our own time.

The Loss of Hunger for Deep Doctrine

The early church was not formed by shallow emotions or shifting cultural trends—it was firmly established upon sound doctrine. From the very beginning, biblical truth served as its backbone, shaping its identity and sustaining its mission. A closer look at the letters of the Apostle Paul to the churches he founded reveals how intensely concerned he was about the danger of false teachings. Time and again, Paul did not merely encourage but solemnly warned the believers to be on guard, to stand firm in the truth, and to exercise spiritual vigilance against every form of doctrinal error.

This concern was not unique to Paul; it echoed the very words of Christ Himself. When our Lord declared, "Even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), He was affirming the enduring strength of His Church—not because of human effort, but because it would be built upon the truth of who He is, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is upon this unshakeable foundation of revealed truth that the Church stands secure.

Sound doctrine is, therefore, not optional—it is the very fuel of the Church. Remove it, and you strip the Church of its power, its purpose, and its distinctiveness. A church that empties the minds of its people of biblical

doctrine may still look busy and active outwardly, but inwardly it is lifeless and directionless. It ceases to be a vessel for God's glory and becomes merely a shell of religious activity.

When Christ began His earthly ministry, His first work was not social reform or political change—it was revelation. He laid down the foundation by revealing the knowledge of God, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and declaring the truth that leads to life. For Christ, that was enough. He needed no other strategy. He knew that a Church built upon the truth of God's Word would endure, grow, and glorify the Father. Nothing else could take its place.

That divine standard and measure—the unchanging truth of God's Word—must be faithfully upheld and protected by men and women who are deeply rooted in the Lord. These are not just leaders by position, but servants who have been proven trustworthy, whose hearts beat with reverence for God and unwavering commitment to His truth. It is their sacred responsibility to guard the integrity of the faith and to ensure that the gospel is not diluted or reshaped into a shallow, man-centered belief system.

The truth of God must never be reduced to superficial slogans or comfortable moralism. Instead, there must be a growing hunger for sound doctrine—a thirst for deeper understanding of the riches of God's grace and holiness. The lives of those entrusted with spiritual leadership

must be marked by passion, commitment, and endurance. They must resist the lure of popularity and ease, and instead embrace the cost of faithfulness, pressing on even when truth becomes unpopular in a world bent on compromise.

Drifting toward temporal pleasures and worldly comforts is dangerous. It leads to spiritual complacency, and in time, that complacency becomes the seedbed of spiritual decline. A church that loses its hunger for truth will eventually lose its lampstand—its witness and power. The danger is not only doctrinal but existential; the very identity of the Church is at stake.

Yet, we must remember that the growth and life of the Church are not mechanical or manufactured by human effort. The Church is not a business, nor a social institution. It is a living organism, intimately woven together by the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. It grows, matures, and endures because Christ Himself sustains it. He is the Head of the Church, and He is at work, sanctifying His people, shaping them into His likeness, preparing them for their final destiny—to be presented to Him as His perfect and spotless bride, radiant with glory and full of grace.

In conclusion, the call to spiritual awakening is no longer distant—it is upon us now. These awakening reminders are gracious gifts from God, confronting us with the sobering truth that much of today's worship and service has become dysfunctional, Christless, and driven more

by form than by faith. Yet in this moment, we are given a way out—an invitation to return to what is pure, biblical, and glorifying to God.

The voice of reformation must be heard again—not as a nostalgic echo from history, but as a living cry that stirs the church toward renewal and repentance. Leaders today must aspire not to worldly success, but to the depths of doctrine that have strengthened generations of faithful believers. Only through the unshakable truths of Scripture can the church be built up, grounded, and sustained in these perilous times.

The resolution before us is both urgent and clear: we need a strong and faithful proclamation of the Word of God—preaching that is centered on Christ, not on man. We need a gospel that not only informs the mind but transforms the heart, calling believers to live as Christ lived, to walk in holiness, humility, and sacrificial love.

We must also guard the sanctity of the church, for it is not a stage for performance or a platform for popularity. It is a sacred body, purchased by the blood of Christ, the place where His glory is to dwell and be displayed. To pollute this sanctuary with compromise, with human agendas, or with worldly ideologies is to dishonor the One who gave His life for her.

Now is the time to return—to reform—and to renew our devotion to Christ alone.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KNOWING GOD—IN THE LIGHT OF HIS KNOWLEDGE

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Every endeavor toward restoration, revival, and the building up of the church must ultimately return to one central and indispensable reality: the knowledge of God. No true spiritual progress can occur apart from this foundation. Without a deep, reverent, and growing understanding of who God is—His holiness, His sovereignty, His grace, and His truth—all our efforts become misguided at best, and empty at worst. If this point is neglected or treated lightly, we lose direction, and our achievements—no matter how impressive they may seem—will lack lasting value and divine approval.

This principle holds true not only for individual believers but also for the corporate life of the Church. Just as Israel faltered when they forgot the Lord their God, so too does the modern church suffer when it divorces activity from intimacy with God. Therefore, we must have the courage to examine and evaluate our past losses, compromises, and missteps—not to despair, but to rightly align ourselves with the will of God. A church that ignores its own drift will continue to function in a way that appears vibrant outwardly, but is ultimately nonsensical and irrelevant in the eyes of a watching world.

On the other hand, when we are humbled enough to admit where we have gone wrong, and we return to the Lord with sincerity, something powerful begins to happen. The church recovers its voice. Its witness is

restored. Its worship is purified. And its mission is reawakened.

This kind of reformation—this sacred return—is not merely optional; it is the first and most necessary step toward reclaiming the divine role that Christ Himself has given to His Church. Only when we are rooted again in the knowledge of God will we be equipped to fulfill our mission as the body of Christ in the world: to shine as a light in the darkness, to proclaim the gospel with clarity, and to make disciples who reflect the glory of our Lord.

Without the sobering truth of truly knowing God, we are merely wasting our time, our strength, and even the memories we build in ministry. All our labors, no matter how passionate or sincere, will ultimately be swept away like sand if they are not rooted in the knowledge of the living God. Ministry success, emotional experiences, and human recognition will all be rendered futile if God is not genuinely known, loved, and glorified in it all. As Scripture reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

Jesus Himself illustrated this through parables. In one, He spoke of a man who, while digging in a field, stumbled upon a treasure. Recognizing its surpassing worth, he went and sold all that he had in order to buy that field (Matthew 13:44). This is not merely a story about earthly investment—it's a portrait of the heart of a true disciple. A believer who has come to see the value of Christ will willingly surrender everything else,

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counting it as loss, in order to gain what is infinitely greater: the knowledge of God and the redemption found in Christ.

This is the mindset of a true follower of Jesus—that the most valuable possession we can ever have in this fleeting world is not material wealth, not ministerial achievements, and not even spiritual gifts in themselves, but a personal and growing knowledge of God, grounded in the finished work of Christ on the cross. This is what Paul meant when he said, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

It is this truth that amazes us and humbles us. That the eternal God would reveal Himself to sinners, and that He would send His Son to die in our place, is the greatest wonder of all. The gospel is not just the starting point of our faith—it is the center and substance of all we do. Without it, we have nothing of eternal value; with it, we have everything.

The Importance of Right Theology

Not all religions possess a correct or biblical understanding of God. In fact, many have either missed the true concept of who God is, deliberately avoided it, or relegated it to a secondary concern. For them, religion is often reduced to a human-centered endeavor—a pursuit of peace, moral improvement, or community harmony. It becomes a tool for relational bonding, a

cultural identity marker, or a system designed to ease the burden of guilt. In some cases, religion is viewed as a charitable institution that cares for the poor, promotes social justice, or fosters expressions of brotherhood and unity. At times, it even functions like a civic organization, emphasizing humanitarian acts while neglecting the divine foundation that should undergird them.

While these aspects may seem noble on the surface, they often lack the vital core: a true and reverent knowledge of the living God. Without this, religion becomes anthropocentric—centered on man rather than on God. It satisfies certain emotional or social needs but fails to ignite a holy hunger to know God deeply and truly. There is no thirst for sound doctrine, no desire for the majesty and holiness of God to be known, loved, and feared. Theology is either ignored or replaced with sentimentality and activism. And where theology is absent or distorted, worship becomes shallow, and people are left with a shell of religion that can never truly satisfy the soul. Only when God is rightly known—according to His self-revelation in Scripture—can there be a genuine longing to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

I am reminded of the courage and sacrifice of early church fathers like Tertullian, whose boldness in the face of death and persecution during the early third century continues to inspire. Though he lived in a time of great

danger for Christians, Tertullian did not waver in proclaiming the truth. He stood firm for the faith, becoming one of the first theologians to articulate and defend what would later be known as the doctrine of the Trinity—a doctrine essential to the Christian understanding of God.[5]

Following in this theological legacy was Saint Athanasius, who, in the face of intense opposition during the fourth century, championed the full divinity of Christ against the rising tide of Arianism. His unwavering defense of orthodox doctrine earned him the title Athanasius contra mundum—"Athanasius against the world." These men were not merely defenders of abstract ideas; they were adherents of Christ, faithfully preserving the apostolic teaching that had been freshly handed down to them. Their theology was not speculative or innovative—it was rooted in divine revelation and faithfully transmitted through the early church.

What I am trying to emphasize is this: sound theology, when it is truly from God and grounded in His Word, has the power to overcome even the fiercest opposition to the gospel. It does not draw strength from the intellect of men but from the unchanging truth of God's will. It was God who used Tertullian and Athanasius to uphold the unity and glory of the triune God. Their theological

[5] Bryan M. Litfin, "Tertullian on the Trinity," *Perichoresis* 17, no.1 (2019): 81-98.

clarity was not just academic—it was spiritual warfare, truth contending against error for the sake of the church and the glory of Christ.

The Need for Bold and Faithful Leaders

In our day, we desperately need men and women who will rise up with the same spirit—fearless in their defense of sound doctrine, passionate for the truth, and unyielding in the face of cultural pressure. We need modern-day Tertullians and Athanasiuses—apologists, pastors, teachers, and church leaders who will boldly proclaim the biblical gospel and stand firm on the historic truths of the Christian faith. May today's church leaders not shrink back, but be courageous in upholding and teaching right theology, knowing that God still uses His truth to preserve, purify, and empower His people.

The Tragedy of Man-Centered Preaching

But as I have observed within much of the Arminian world, there is a troubling trend in the way preaching is carried out—it is often shaped more by the demands and preferences of the people than by the authority of God's Word. Instead of faithfully declaring the whole counsel of God, many preachers tend to focus on messages that are emotionally appealing, motivational, or culturally acceptable. The emphasis is often on what people want to hear, rather than what they need to hear. As a result, the pulpit becomes more of a platform for pleasing man than a sacred desk for proclaiming the truth of Christ.

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This tendency leads to dangerous compromises. In an effort to avoid offending listeners or to attract larger crowds, many dilute the gospel. Key doctrines such as the total depravity of man, the sovereign grace of God, the necessity of repentance, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ are either downplayed or neglected altogether. Instead of confronting sin and exalting Christ, the message becomes man-centered—focused on self-improvement, felt needs, or worldly success.

Such preaching may gather followers, but it does not produce true disciples. It lacks the power to convict, transform, and save. Paul warned of this very thing in 2 Timothy 4:3–4: "For the time will come when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions." Sadly, that time has come in many pulpits today.

True gospel preaching must not be driven by the applause of men but by the fear of God. It must not adjust to the trends of culture but stand firmly on the unchanging truth of Scripture. The call of every preacher is not to entertain or to please, but to proclaim Christ and Him crucified, with boldness, clarity, and faithfulness.

The Cultural Struggle of Seeking Christ in Filipino Families

As Filipinos, we often long for a deeper understanding of God and a more serious walk with Him. However, this

desire is sometimes met with resistance—not necessarily from strangers, but from our own family and relatives. In our culture, where close family ties are highly valued, pursuing a higher and more personal level of spiritual maturity can be misunderstood. Some may see it as a rejection of tradition or as an attempt to appear more "spiritual" than others. This often leads to hesitation, fear of being judged, or even emotional distance from those we love.

Religious Zeal Without Biblical Clarity

Many of our relatives may be religiously zealous—devoted in their own ways, yet not always open to deeper biblical reflection or reform. Because of this, the person who seeks to know Christ more intimately may feel isolated or even accused of being "too serious" or "different." This cultural pressure can create a spiritual struggle: we want to grow, but we fear being alienated. And yet, the call to follow Christ sometimes involves walking a path that others may not immediately understand.

That is why many choose to adopt a certain manner or principle—not necessarily because it is biblically sound, but because it helps maintain peace and good standing within the community, especially within their own families. The fear of offending others or being perceived as different becomes more powerful than the desire to know the truth of God's Word. For some, reading the Bible is intentionally avoided—not because they don't

have time, but because they are afraid that doing so will attract mockery or teasing. They are told, "You're trying to be too holy," or, "Are you planning to fly straight to heaven now?" These comments may seem harmless, but they reveal a deeper issue—a discomfort with real spiritual growth.

This kind of spiritual apathy is common in many communities. While it may appear to be a sign of humility or devotion to their religion, in reality it reflects a lack of proper knowledge of who God truly is. Their loyalty to religious traditions is strong, but it is not always rooted in the clear teaching of Scripture. Instead, devotion becomes more about pleasing others than about pleasing God.

When the Church Reflects the World's Values

Sadly, this attitude has not only remained within families but has also crept into the church community. Many congregations prioritize harmony over truth, tradition over transformation, and reputation over repentance. People attend services, follow rituals, and even serve in ministries—but their hearts remain untouched by the living Word of God. They fear man more than they fear God. As a result, biblical knowledge is shallow, spiritual conviction is rare, and true reformation is hindered.

If this continues, how can there be genuine growth in the knowledge of God? How can there be revival in the church when the Word is avoided rather than cherished?

And how can faith be passed to the next generation if we ourselves are too afraid to go deeper?

In the area of evangelism—especially when leading people to Christ—many are deeply mindful of cultural sensitivities. They consider culture to be of great importance, and in many ways, it truly is. Understanding the language, customs, and values of a people group helps in building relationships and creating opportunities for the gospel to be heard. However, a line must be drawn when cultural concern begins to outweigh gospel clarity.

All too often, when it's time to present the truth about Christ, some hold back. There's a sense of hesitation rooted in thoughts like, "Nakakahiya naman, baka masaktan sila—kumpare ko pa naman 'yan," or "Baka isipin nila na minamaliit ko ang paniniwala nila." While such concerns may come from a place of respect or love, they can easily become a stumbling block that hinders the bold proclamation of the truth.

This fear of offending others—or of straining relationships with friends, relatives, or community leaders—can become a subtle form of compromise. Evangelism becomes diluted, cautious, or vague. The preacher or witness becomes more concerned with maintaining social harmony than with proclaiming Christ clearly and faithfully.

But the gospel, by its very nature, is both gracious and offensive. It confronts sin, exposes the emptiness of man-made religion, and calls all people to repent and believe in Christ alone. That message, though full of life and hope, will not always be well received. Jesus Himself warned us, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you" (Luke 6:26), and reminded us that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34)—not in the sense of violence, but division between truth and error.

I believe that the fear of rejection or conflict has become one of the biggest hindrances in gospel proclamation today. We hesitate not because we lack the truth, but because we fear how others might respond to it. But if we truly love people, we must tell them the truth—even when it is hard, even when it may cost us friendships or favor.

In evangelism, cultural awareness is helpful—but gospel boldness is essential. To love our culture is not to flatter it with silence, but to speak into it with the unchanging truth of God's Word. And in doing so, we show not only our love for people—but our highest loyalty to Christ.

In the same way, this tension between truth and comfort also manifests within the bounds of preaching in the church. Many preachers, whether knowingly or not, adjust their sermons to avoid offending their congregation. In order not to stumble or upset the hearers—many of whom are friends, potential converts,

new believers, or influential people in the community—they resort to preaching messages that are primarily comforting, motivational, and emotionally uplifting.

At face value, there is nothing wrong with encouraging sermons. The gospel indeed brings hope, joy, and comfort. But when comfort becomes the primary goal of preaching—rather than the faithful exposition of God's Word—something vital is lost. Preachers begin to permit themselves to sound pious in words, using spiritual language and phrases that appear deep and sincere, yet neglect the real intention of preaching: to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), to convict of sin, to call for repentance, to exalt Christ, and to equip the saints for holiness and perseverance.

What results is a pulpit that becomes shallow, therapeutic, and man-centered. Sin is rarely addressed. The cross is only mentioned in passing. God's holiness and wrath are downplayed. And instead of confronting the hearers with the seriousness of their spiritual condition, they are reassured week after week with pleasant messages that seek only to soothe, never to sanctify.

This kind of preaching, though popular and well-received, ultimately betrays the true calling of the preacher. It fears man more than God. It confuses love with approval. And it forgets that true spiritual comfort

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comes not from evading truth, but from embracing it—no matter how hard it may be to hear at first.

The church is not called to entertain, but to edify—and true edification begins with truth, even when that truth wounds before it heals. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "The gospel is offensive in itself; do not make it more so, but do not hide its offense. Preach the gospel boldly."

In a generation where many pulpits are silenced by fear of offending, we must remember: our duty is not to please men, but to be faithful stewards of the Word of God. Let the preacher comfort, yes—but let him do so through the truth, not by avoiding it.

Knowing God vs. Knowing About God

Matthew 7:21 reveals a sobering truth about the standards of God's kingdom. Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." This verse makes a crucial distinction between mere religious expression and genuine obedience to the will of God. It is possible to appear religious—to say the right words, attend the right gatherings, and perform outward acts of piety—yet still be outside the will of God.

Those who truly walk in God's will are those who have received His pardon through Christ, been granted eternal life, and are now being sanctified daily. Their lives

reflect a real transformation. Sanctification, for them, is not merely a doctrine but a daily lifestyle, a fruit of genuine union with Christ.

What this shows us is that knowing about God is vastly different from truly knowing Him. Intellectual knowledge or religious familiarity with God cannot replace a personal, saving relationship with Him. True knowledge of the Lord is marked by humility, repentance, trust in Christ, and a growing conformity to His likeness. It cannot be bypassed through mere religious activities. At stake here is not just a difference in lifestyle, but the very difference between life and death, between Christ and hell.

Sadly, many remain spiritually blind to these things. As Scripture says, the minds of the unbelieving are veiled (2 Corinthians 4:4), unable to perceive the weight and glory of the gospel. Jesus Himself gave a parallel image when He spoke of the final judgment: He will separate the wheat from the chaff—placing the wheat (true believers) on His right and casting the chaff (false professors) into the fire (Matthew 13:30; cf. Matthew 25:31–33). This illustrates the eternal consequence of failing to truly know Christ. It is a warning to all who assume that outward religiosity is sufficient.

In the end, only those who have entered into a living relationship with Jesus—those who do the will of the Father—will enter the kingdom of heaven. The call, therefore, is to examine ourselves, to seek the Lord while

He may be found, and to truly walk with Him in faith and obedience.

A Gracious Reminder, Not a Burden

The essence of this work is not to weigh people down with guilt or to impose legalistic burdens, but rather to serve as a gracious reminder of what truly matters. It is a call to awaken hearts to the reality that life on earth is fleeting—a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14). In light of this brevity, we must not waste the precious time we are given by living carelessly or half-heartedly. Instead, we are exhorted to live under the constant guidance and empowering presence of the Lord.

For those who know the Lord genuinely and truly life cannot remain ordinary. Knowing Christ deeply leads to transformation. It reorders our priorities, redirects our desires, and redefines what is meaningful. To go through life without taking God seriously is not only foolish—it is tragic. It is to squander the very purpose for which we were created.

God did not leave us to wander aimlessly in our sin and confusion. Out of His great love, He reached out to us by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile us to Himself. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the way was opened for sinners to be forgiven, cleansed, and restored into fellowship with the living God. This is not

a small matter—it is the heart of the gospel and the most urgent message any soul must hear.

Therefore, this reminder comes not from a spirit of condemnation but from love. It is a plea for us all to examine our lives: Are we living as those who have been redeemed? Are we devoting ourselves to the One who gave everything for us? To delay serious devotion is to delay joy, peace, and purpose. To ignore Christ is to risk eternity.

Let us not treat lightly what cost our Savior His blood. Let us not be casual where God calls us to be committed. And let us never forget that every moment apart from Him is a moment wasted—while every moment surrendered to Him is eternally meaningful.

How Reformed Truth Leads to Reverence and Worship

Fixing our mind is one of the central aims of Scripture, for it is through the renewing of the mind that our lives are settled and brought into the path of perfect obedience to Christ. The mind is not a neutral ground—it is the throne of the human spirit, the seat of thought, reason, and intention. Our spirit functions through the mind by perceiving and processing truth—truth that must be aligned with the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. From there, the understanding formed in the mind is passed on to the heart, where conviction, affection, and action are birthed. The heart, in this theological sense, is

not merely the seat of emotion, but the center of volitional response—deeply connected with the mind in a holy union of knowledge and devotion.

This is why the Reformed truth must first dwell richly in the mind. If our thinking is not shaped by the Word of God—by sound doctrine grounded in Scripture—then our worship becomes aimless, driven by emotion or tradition rather than truth. A mind saturated with gospel truth leads to worship that is both pleasurable and reverent—pleasurable because it delights in God's glory, and reverent because it recognizes His holiness.

In this light, the openness of the mind to the truth of the gospel is indispensable in our pursuit of genuine worship. When the mind resists truth or is clouded by worldly philosophies, the heart cannot rightly respond in worship. But when the mind is captivated by the majesty, grace, and sovereignty of God revealed in Christ, it ignites a chain of spiritual response that flows into the heart and out through the life. Thus, true worship is born from a mind renewed by truth and a heart inflamed by grace.

It is undeniably true that the Word of God is our ultimate guiding principle—our standard for life, worship, and devotion. Without the clear and authoritative light of Scripture, worship loses its direction and essence. It may become emotional, traditional, or even well-meaning, but it cannot be truly pleasing to the Father unless it is grounded in the truth He has revealed. Apart from the

divine message of God's Word, our approach to Him has no power, no life, and no potential to glorify His holy name. As Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." Worship not rooted in this truth is void of spiritual vitality and fails to reflect the glory of the One we claim to honor.

But since we—by God's grace—have been enlightened by His Word, our hearts and minds are awakened to His majesty and holiness. This enlightenment demands a response, and that response is genuine worship marked by humility, passion, and submission. We are called to prostrate ourselves—not merely outwardly, but inwardly—with hearts bowed low before His sovereign will, acknowledging that He alone is worthy of our adoration. Worship becomes a holy offering when it flows from a heart shaped by Scripture and yielded to God's purposes.

Such worship truly magnifies our Lord. It reflects the beauty of holiness, the wonder of grace, and the majesty of His revealed truth. The more deeply we are formed by the Word, the more fully we glorify God in our worship—not as ritual, but as a joyful and reverent communion with the living God.

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CHAPTER THREE

TRUE IDENTITY AND SERVICE TO CHRIST

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True Identity and Service in Christ

We are given a sobering yet gracious exhortation from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5, where he writes, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" These words are not intended to plant fear in the hearts of genuine believers, but rather to stir up a holy self-examination that leads to assurance, sanctification, and spiritual fruitfulness.

As believers in Christ, our identity is not based on mere verbal profession or outward association with the church. We are not only chosen by God from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), but we are also the redeemed people of God, purchased by the blood of Christ, set apart by the Spirit, and sealed for the day of redemption. This dual identity—as both elect and redeemed—carries with it a divine calling to live lives that reflect God's transforming grace.

The Believer's True Identity in Union with Christ

In a world that is increasingly marked by perplexity, moral confusion, and hopelessness, the Christian is called to stand distinctively—not in arrogance, but in humility and truth. Our lives should testify to the reality of Christ in us. We are not here to blend into the world's darkness, but to shine as lights (Phil. 2:15), showing that we are citizens of a different kingdom.

This leads us to crucial questions: Who are we in Christ? What function do we serve in the body of Christ? What specific duties must we render as those who claim to be elected by grace?

1. Who we are – We are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), ambassadors for Christ (v. 20), and temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Our new identity reshapes every part of our being—from our thoughts to our actions, from our private lives to our public witness.

2. What function should we do? —As part of the body of Christ, each believer is gifted and called to a specific role. Whether as preachers, encouragers, servants, or intercessors, we are to use our gifts for the edification of the church and the advancement of the gospel (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11).

3. What duties prove our election? —While election is rooted in God's sovereign grace and not in our works (Rom. 9:11; Eph. 2:8–9), it inevitably produces fruit that confirms its reality. Peter exhorts us to "make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10) by growing in virtues like faith, knowledge, self-control, and love. These are not means to earn salvation but evidence that grace is truly at work in us.Thus, the life of the believer must be marked by ongoing

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> transformation, visible holiness, and joyful obedience. The more we live in light of God's grace and calling, the more our election is confirmed—not only to ourselves, but as a witness to others.

In these perilous times, let us heed Paul's exhortation. Let us test ourselves, not to wallow in doubt, but to be anchored in truth. Let us walk in the Spirit, bear fruit, and live as those whom Christ has redeemed—set apart for His glory and purposes.

Let us be reminded of the wondrous work that God has accomplished in each of our lives—an act so profound that it not only redeems us but also marks us unmistakably as His own possession. This divine act of identification is not merely symbolic or superficial; it is rooted in the transforming power of God's sovereign grace. Throughout the Scriptures, we encounter numerous individuals whose lives were radically altered by God's intervention. These biblical figures serve as living testimonies—concrete examples of how the grace and power of God break into human lives and reshape them entirely.

Take, for instance, the prophet Isaiah. As Philip Ryken insightfully explained from a Reformed (Calvinistic) perspective, Isaiah's experience in chapter 6 is a clear display of God's initiative in salvation. Isaiah was undone by the holiness of God and the depth of his own sin, crying out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a

man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5, ESV). But notice what followed: God did not leave Isaiah in that state. Instead, by His grace, He provided atonement—symbolized by the coal taken from the altar to cleanse Isaiah's lips. This was not merely a ritual cleansing but a spiritual transformation, preparing Isaiah to be a prophetic mouthpiece of God.[6]

Ryken's interpretation highlights a crucial truth: salvation is initiated and completed by God's grace alone. It is this grace that cleanses not only our lips but our whole being, giving us a new identity in Christ. Through Christ, we are not just forgiven—we are made new. We are given new hearts, new desires, new purposes, and a new status: children of the living God.

Let us, therefore, stand in awe of this marvelous grace. The same God who transformed Isaiah is still at work today, calling sinners, cleansing them, and commissioning them for His glory. May we never forget that our identity as God's people is not something we earned, but something freely given through Christ—a testimony of His irresistible and transforming grace.

It is truly a fascinating and awe-inspiring event to imagine—the day when the names written in the Book of Life will be called aloud, each one unmistakably declared with divine precision. Those whose lives bore

[6] Philip Graham Ryken, *What is a True Calvinist?* (Wheaton, Ill.; Crossway,2002), 14-15.

witness to their faithfulness in Christ will hear their names with holy joy, as they are welcomed into eternal glory, crowned with righteousness as promised. This is not merely a poetic vision, but a profound reality grounded in God's Word. As Psalm 1 affirms, "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." In that moment of final reckoning, this divine knowledge will be made manifest. For the righteous, it will not be a moment of uncertainty, but of completion—where faith ceases because it gives way to sight, and hope is fulfilled in the fullness of God's glorious presence. It will be the moment when all the longings of the believer are satisfied, not because of their works, but because of God's unfailing grace. The end of the journey will not be emptiness, but the unveiling of the very God we trusted and served. In that hour, faith will be finished, and God will be seen—not dimly or from afar, but clearly and gloriously, face to face.

From Identity Flows Service: Biblical Discipleship

We are called children of God—not by our own merit, but because God Himself has called us. It is a divine calling that brings life, overflowing with spiritual blessings and daily provisions. From the beginning of our journey to the final lap of our race, it is God who sustains and endures with us, ensuring that we are brought to completion in Christ. This is the promise of Philippians 1:6—that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ

Jesus." It is through this process that His sovereign will prevails in our lives, shaping and molding us according to His image, not according to our preferences or efforts.

True discipleship, therefore, does not begin with human effort or emotional experience, but with a genuine recognition and submission to the Lordship of Christ. The problem many face today is trying to turn goats into sheep, which is impossible. No method, program, or training can transform an unregenerate heart. In the divine economy of God, one must first be made a sheep—born again by the Spirit—before the path of discipleship can truly begin. As Christ declared, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Regeneration precedes instruction; conversion comes before transformation.

This theological truth was boldly reclaimed during the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, emphasized that salvation is sola gratia (by grace alone), sola fide (through faith alone), and solus Christus (in Christ alone). They saw clearly that no human work or institutional program could produce true disciples. The Church had drifted into sacramentalism and moralism, believing that external rituals could change the heart. But the Reformers pointed back to the gospel—that only God can create a new heart, and from that new heart flows true obedience and spiritual growth.

Today, while we marvel at how many churches offer various training programs and seminars for deeper equipping of the saints—often with sincere intentions to advance the kingdom of God—we must also be discerning. Unfortunately, much of modern discipleship has become blended with the strategies and philosophies of this world. The biblical foundation is often replaced with temporary trends, business models, and emotional appeal, rather than rooted in sound doctrine and the transforming power of the Word. As in the days of the Reformers, there is a pressing need to return to the sufficiency of Scripture and the centrality of Christ in all aspects of discipleship.

May we not forget that the goal of discipleship is not mere activity, but conformity to Christ. As we walk this journey, let us remember that it is God who begins, sustains, and completes the work in us—and that genuine transformation begins when God, by His sovereign grace, makes us His sheep. From there, discipleship is not forced, but flows as the natural fruit of a heart redeemed.

The very essence of true discipleship is to cause every heart to beat for Christ and every thought to be captivated by Him. Discipleship is not merely a set of religious activities or scheduled meetings—it is the Spirit-empowered shaping of a person's entire life around the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are to "take every

thought captive to obey Christ." This means our training and discipleship efforts should never be reduced to simply accommodating people's preferences or designing programs tailored to human desires. Rather, the goal must always be to conform hearts, minds, and lives to the image of Christ in every aspect—public and private, spiritual and practical, theological and relational.

Discipleship is not about producing religious consumers, but Christlike followers. Jesus Himself set the pattern: He did not call men to join a system; He called them to follow Him, to die to themselves, and to live for the glory of God. Therefore, the ultimate aim of every discipling effort is Christlikeness—to form in the believer the very mind, character, and mission of Christ (Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:29).

One of the greatest challenges in discipleship, however, lies not in the content of the curriculum, nor in the availability of resources, but in the spiritual condition of the one being discipled. The hardest and most foundational reality is that effective discipleship requires a genuinely converted heart as I've mentioned earlier (sheep and goat comparison). No amount of teaching, no matter how biblical or structured, can bring about lasting spiritual fruit in an unregenerate soul. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Without the new birth, discipleship becomes nothing more than moral reformation or behavioral management. But where there

is true conversion—where the heart has been made alive by the Spirit—there is both the hunger and the capacity to be trained, shaped, and sanctified in the likeness of Christ.

This is where many modern discipleship efforts falter. There is a tendency to launch straight into programs, classes, or leadership tracks without first discerning whether the individuals have been truly born again. The result is that churches often build ministries filled with active participants who lack spiritual transformation. As the Reformers emphasized, especially in light of sola fide (faith alone), no external discipline can produce internal change unless God first grants saving faith.

Therefore, faithful discipleship begins by proclaiming the gospel clearly and calling people to repentance and faith in Christ. Only then, when the heart has been regenerated by grace, can the journey of transformation take place. From that point forward, the focus of every training session, mentorship, and community gathering must be to cultivate a deeper knowledge of Christ, a stronger obedience to His Word, and a growing desire to glorify Him in all things.

Discipleship, in its truest form, is not about numbers, programs, or performances. It is about Christ being formed in His people (Galatians 4:19). It is about a lifelong journey of grace, where believers are not merely taught about Christ, but are conformed to Christ. And for this, we need not just strategy—but the sovereign work

of God in salvation, the faithful exposition of Scripture, and a church committed to making Christ the center of all discipleship efforts.

Christ as our Master, Savior, and Lord continually provides us with the means to grow in grace, shaping us to reflect His own life and character. He has exemplified for us the path of true discipleship—through His deep knowledge of the Scriptures, His perfect obedience to the will of the Father, His endurance of the suffering and shame of the cross, and His profound humility that sought not His own interests but the glory of God. These aspects of Christ's life are not merely moral examples; they are the very mold into which we are being shaped by the Spirit. They are sufficient for us to understand what it means to live in a manner that is pleasing to Him.

Christianity is Christ—Christ alone. It is not primarily about your availability or willingness to sacrifice everything for His sake, though these may come as fruit. The deeper truth is this: it is the sovereign work of God in you. The Christian life is not rooted in what you can do for God, but in what God has ordained and is doing in you, through every circumstance of your life.

All things—both joys and trials, victories and failures—are part of God's unfolding will, designed not just to happen to you but to shape you according to His purpose. It is not you producing growth on your own strength, but God orchestrating all things so that you may walk in the path He has already laid out for you.

This is the true flow of Christ's discipleship in us: a divine calling, a divine shaping, and a divine sustaining.

Reformed Understanding of Vocation and Calling

All the spiritual blessings we experience in this life—whether spiritual or material—are ultimately from the Lord. Without His generous provision and sovereign grace, we would never truly know the joy of living or the meaning of life itself. Everything that we possess and experience, from the forgiveness of sins to the food on our table, flows from the hand of a gracious and loving God (James 1:17).

Among the many blessings He gives, one of the most precious is His calling—both to salvation and to a particular vocation in life. Our calling begins with God's initiative. He is the One who calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). He has called us to Himself, not only for redemption but also for a specific role in His kingdom. Whether as a pastor, a teacher, a laborer, a mother, or any other position in life, God ordains and appoints our place and purpose according to His divine plan (Ephesians 2:10).

We must understand, however, that calling has two aspects in Scripture:

1. General Calling – This refers to the universal invitation of the gospel to all people. As 1 John 2:2 declares, Christ is "the propitiation for our

sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." The gospel call goes out to all, offering salvation to anyone who will repent and believe.

2. Effectual Calling – This is the particular, powerful call of God that effectively brings a person to saving faith. While many may hear the outward call, only those whom God draws will come to Christ (John 6:44). This is a sovereign work of grace in the heart, wherein God opens blind eyes and softens hardened hearts to respond in faith.

Just like election, calling is not rooted in our own initiative. It is God who moves first. Everything begins with Him. From before the foundation of the world, He has chosen His people in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). This is a profound mystery, and we can only rightly understand it by submitting ourselves to His Word and trusting in His wisdom. His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), and though we may not grasp every detail, we are called to rest in His sovereign grace.

Ultimately, our calling and vocation are not about self-fulfillment, but about God's fulfillment of His redemptive plan in and through us. We are where we are because of God's divine hand. Therefore, we must live out our calling—whether in ministry, in work, or in

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family—with humility, gratitude, and faithful obedience to the One who called us.

It is profoundly essential for every believer to understand that our calling is effectual—that is, it is not merely an external invitation, but a sovereign and irresistible work of God that accomplishes exactly what He intends. This calling does not originate from man's desire, will, or initiative, but flows entirely from the sovereign purpose and gracious initiative of God (Romans 8:30; John 1:12–13).

This truth is not a small or secondary matter. It is a crucial doctrine that shapes how we understand salvation, grace, and the very nature of our relationship with God. Our calling does not begin with our response—it begins with God's eternal decree, planned before the foundation of the world.

And this calling finds its climax and fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the central focus of God's redemptive plan. Through the proclamation of His Word and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, this calling becomes a living and transforming reality in the hearts of God's chosen people (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14).

Yet, sadly, many professing Christians are not well-acquainted with this doctrine. Many believe they are called, yet they do not fully grasp how that calling took place. They may respond emotionally to a sermon

or make a public profession of faith, yet remain unaware that true, effectual calling is not the result of human emotion but of God's sovereign grace acting upon a dead heart, making it alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1–5).

Thanks be to God for the legacy of the Reformers, who, through careful study of the Scriptures, recovered the biblical doctrine of effectual calling. They reminded the Church that salvation is not man's work toward God, but God's work in man, bringing the sinner irresistibly and lovingly to Himself.

May this glorious truth not merely pass through our ears like another piece of information. Instead, may it awaken in us a deep hunger and thirst—to know more, to go deeper, and to marvel at the greatness of God's grace in calling us effectually. Let us never grow tired of learning and proclaiming that "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Psalm 3:8), and that even our coming to Christ is the result of His gracious call.

How Does God Save Men, or Make His Call for His People?

Although the way God calls His people remains a profound mystery, it is not entirely hidden from us. Through His Word, God has graciously unveiled the depths of His redemptive plan, enabling us to grasp—at least in part—how He executes His divine calling. The Scriptures repeatedly affirm that God's call is effectual, issuing forth not merely as an invitation but as a

powerful summons that brings spiritual life to those who were once dead in sin (Eph. 2:1–5).

While we may not fully comprehend all the intricacies of His sovereign will, we are not left in total darkness. Scripture provides concrete truths that illuminate how God chooses His people—from before the foundation of the world, in Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:4–5). This mystery, once concealed through the ages, was revealed by Christ Himself, who came not only to accomplish redemption but also to make known the divine plan that undergirds it. He unveiled the eternal inheritance prepared for the elect and assured His followers of their place in the kingdom of God.

As He declared in Matthew 25:34, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" These words not only point to the future glory of the redeemed but also reveal the eternal intention of the Father to call, bless, and glorify a people for Himself. Thus, though the divine calling remains mysterious in its depths, it is also wondrously clear in its revelation—God calls, God saves, and God glorifies, all according to His unfailing grace.

God's calling is not arbitrary, rather, it flows entirely from His grace and was secured for us through the atoning death of His Son on the cross. What may seem

mysterious to human reason becomes clear through the lens of divine revelation. The cross is not only the means by which redemption was accomplished, but also the guarantee that God's plan will be fulfilled. Through Christ's death, the eternal call of God becomes a living reality in the hearts of His people. And though regeneration—the inward transformation of the heart—remains a divine work beyond full human explanation, it is the unmistakable evidence of God's sovereign and effectual call.

There are various perspectives on how God carries out His calling. Some well-known groups, such as the Arminians, emphasize the universal scope of God's election. As Robert Raymond points out in his book, Arminians maintain that salvation is offered to all people. He explains that this view leads to one of three conclusions: either God is not solely responsible for salvation and it ultimately depends on something within or done by man; or God's saving grace is not truly universal; or, if it is, then it would follow that all people are saved.[7]

This statement clearly affirms that man's perception and understanding of God's calling is often clouded and obscure. It does not unfold to us in its full clarity or definition, for the workings of divine grace transcend

[7]Robert Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith,* 2nd. ed. (Nashville: TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002.), 472

human comprehension. When the Lord executes His redemptive work, He neither depends upon nor requires any contribution from man to bring it to pass. The reason is sobering yet deeply biblical: we are utterly incapable of aiding in our salvation due to the power of our depravity.

In our natural state, we are not merely sick or morally weak—we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), enslaved to sinful desires (Rom. 6:17), and entirely incapable of seeking after God (Rom. 3:10–11). Any notion that man can cooperate with God in initiating or completing redemption is a direct contradiction of the gospel of grace. Salvation is not a joint effort between divine initiative and human will; it is a sovereign act of God from beginning to end.

It is God Himself who orchestrates this divine intervention. From eternity past, He planned it; in time, He executed it through Christ; and by His Spirit, He applies it to His elect. This design ensures that no human merit can find a place in the work of redemption. As Paul declares in Romans 9:16, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” The grace that calls is the grace that saves, and it does so without consulting human effort, foreseen faith, or natural ability.

Therefore, the obscurity of man’s grasp of God’s calling serves not to frustrate faith but to magnify the glory of divine grace. It reminds us that salvation is of the Lord

(Jonah 2:9), and every aspect of it—from calling to glorification—is rooted in the sovereign mercy of God alone.

The Reformation view of election stands as a clear and faithful articulation of the biblical doctrine. Rooted in the unchanging Word of God, it conveys the true essence of divine election—not as a human-centered decision, but as a sovereign act of God's mercy and grace. The Reformers, particularly men like Augustine, Calvin, and Luther, recovered this glorious truth from the obscurity into which it had fallen during the medieval period, proclaiming once again that salvation is entirely of God—from election to final glorification.

However, despite the clarity and power of this Reformed doctrine, many have broken away from this truth and constructed their own interpretations of election, often driven more by philosophical reasoning or emotional appeal than by Scripture. As previously mentioned, Arminianism is one such departure. It shifts the emphasis from God's sovereign choice to man's free will, thereby weakening the glory of grace and subtly reintroducing human merit into the redemptive plan.

Yet the distortion does not end there. In our time, we are witnessing an even greater drift from biblical truth. Many preachers and churches have risen who no longer ground their message in the Word of God. Instead, they proclaim what the apostle Paul would call "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6–7)—messages that appear spiritual but

are devoid of true substance. The prosperity gospel, for instance, turns the message of the cross into a means for material gain. The so-called healing gospel makes physical health the chief aim of God's promises. Others preach motivational, success-oriented messages, reducing the majesty of Christ's redemptive work to mere self-improvement techniques.

These teachings may draw large crowds and stir strong emotions, but they lack the essence of the true gospel. They do not confront sin, exalt the grace of God, or lead souls to a saving knowledge of Christ. Instead, they twist Scripture to fit human desires rather than calling people to repentance and faith. In contrast, the Reformed doctrine of election humbles the sinner, magnifies the Savior, and exalts the sovereign God who alone saves.

This is why it is essential for preachers in every generation to return to the Word, to proclaim the truths recovered during the Reformation, and to lift high the gospel of sovereign grace. Only then will the church stand firm against the flood of false teachings that seek to obscure the glory of Christ and the power of His saving work.

Today, there are countless individuals who are being deceived—drawn into religious activities that appear spiritual on the surface but are lacking in biblical substance. Many churches are being planted with little to no theological foundation, often in trendy and convenient locations such as shopping malls, cinemas,

and entertainment venues. These venues are chosen not for the sake of gospel mission but for comfort, visibility, and attraction. People, moved by curiosity or a vague sense of spiritual duty, walk in and attend these gatherings, hoping to ease their conscience or fulfill a sense of obligation to God. Sadly, most do so without discerning the nature of the message being preached or the foundation upon which these churches are built.

There is often no deep examination of doctrine, no pastoral care that leads to true repentance, and no faithful proclamation of the gospel. The result is a generation of professing believers who are emotionally stirred but spiritually shallow—followers who have never been confronted by the weight of their sin or the majesty of God's holiness.

When we look at the primitive church—the early church founded by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit—we see a stark contrast. That church did not grow through comfort or popularity, but through hardship, suffering, and persecution. The apostles and early believers proclaimed the gospel not to fill buildings with people, but to fulfill the Great Commission given by their risen Lord: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Their passion was not church growth by numbers but gospel faithfulness, even if it meant rejection, imprisonment, or death. They paid a high price for the truth they preached, and they shed their own blood for the sake of Christ.

This kind of church—rooted in truth, shaped by suffering, and sustained by grace—is far removed from the modern model of church planting that prioritizes convenience, crowd-pleasing methods, and emotional hype. Today, many churches are formed with ease, without sacrifice, without tears, and without the weight of Christ's cross upon their shoulders. As a result, the depth of discipleship has weakened, and the shepherding of souls has become more like managing audiences than caring for Christ's flock.

There is a great need in our time to return to the biblical pattern—a church that does not conform to the world, but is conformed to Christ; a people who are not seeking comfort, but are willing to count the cost; pastors who are not entertainers, but faithful shepherds willing to lay down their lives for the sheep (John 10:11). Only then will the church regain its true power—not in buildings or numbers, but in truth, holiness, and unwavering allegiance to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The true essence of God's calling to His people—particularly to those whom He sets apart for ministry—is not rooted in worldly success, popularity, or favorable outcomes. Rather, it is centered on the faithful proclamation of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether people respond in faith or turn away in rejection, the one who is called must remain faithful to his task. His duty is not to manipulate results or to please men, but to preach Christ crucified with boldness, humility, and unwavering

conviction. As the apostle Paul said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

This divine calling is not limited to words alone. It also demands that the life of the messenger reflect the message he proclaims. He is to be equipped not only in doctrine and truth, but also in character and godliness—demonstrating the reality of Christ in his life. The Christian life is not a performance, but a living testimony of transformation. Those who are called to serve must display in their conduct the beauty of Christ's person: His humility, holiness, compassion, and steadfastness. In this way, their very lives become a visible witness to the power of the gospel.

These are the sobering truths about our calling. It is not a light responsibility but a sacred trust. The ultimate purpose is that the Lord may be magnified in all things, with Christ exalted as the center of every word and deed. And this calling is not without cost. The faithful will face opposition, rejection, and even persecution—but still, they are not to retreat. There must be no turning back, no surrender, for we have been called to endure and to stand firm, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

In a world that increasingly resists truth, the one who is truly called must be ready to suffer for the sake of Christ. But with suffering comes the assurance of fellowship with the Savior and the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). This is the high and holy calling: to proclaim

Christ, to reflect Christ, and to glorify God no matter the cost.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SALT AND LIGHT

THAT HAS LOST ITS POWER

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The Church as Salt and Light in the World

The power behind Christ's proclamation concerning the Church was not a mere verbal declaration—it was a divine act fulfilled and accomplished through His death, resurrection, and ascension. When Christ said, "I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18), He was not speaking of an uncertain hope, but of a sovereign purpose that He Himself would bring to pass. The Church is not a human invention; it is the blood-bought assembly of the redeemed, called out from the world to belong to Him and to live for His glory.

Christ did not establish the Church to become a battleground of contradicting doctrines, denominational rivalries, or personal ambitions. He did not intend for His body to be divided by the pride of men or the superficial preferences that often cause division among believers. The true intention of Christ in building His Church was to unite His people in one body, under one Head, for one mission.

At the heart of this mission is fellowship and proclamation. Christ desires His people to gather together—not simply out of religious habit, but out of a deep love for one another and a shared devotion to Him. In this gathering, believers are to demonstrate mutual care, compassion, and humility, reflecting the character of Christ Himself. The Church becomes a visible

expression of the unity and love found within the Triune God.

But the Church's calling does not end with inward fellowship—it must extend outward. Together, God's people are commissioned to proclaim the glory of Christ to a world that remains in darkness. Many hearts remain clouded by ignorance of who Christ truly is—His deity, His kingship, His grace, and His redeeming power. The Church is to be the loudspeaker of heaven's message: that Jesus is Lord, and salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12).

Thus, the power of Christ's Church lies not in its size, its wealth, or its programs, but in its faithfulness to its Head—Christ. A Church united in love, grounded in truth, and bold in witness bears the marks of divine power and purpose. In such a Church, the world catches a glimpse of the reality of the risen Christ.

To have some studies about the word church let us consider the significance of R.C. Sproul's explanation in relation to the holiness of God.

1. The Church Is Called to Be Holy

For R.C. Sproul, the central attribute of God is His holiness. Because of that, the Church—being the body of Christ—is likewise called to reflect holiness in all areas of life. He emphasized:

The Church is not just a gathering of religious people—it is a set-apart people, called to reflect the character of a holy God in a corrupt world. Holiness is not optional; it is the very identity of the Church.

2. Worship Is the Center of the Church's Holiness

According to Sproul, true worship is the soul's response to the holiness of God. In his exposition of Isaiah's vision of God (Isaiah 6), he pointed out that worship is not primarily for entertainment or self-fulfillment—it is a holy encounter:

Thus, worship in the Church should be reverent, God-centered, and grounded in awe, not casual or shallow. The Church must lead people to tremble before the majesty of God, not just feel good about themselves.

3. The Church Must Proclaim Truth in a Sinful World

Sproul was very clear that a holy Church cannot be silent in the face of sin. The Church must proclaim the truth of God's holiness to a world drowning in moral confusion. He warned:

A true Church must stand upon the authority of Scripture, not culture or the approval of man. It must preach Christ, sin, judgment, grace, and repentance, without compromise.

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4. Church Discipline Reflects the Holiness of God

Although unpopular today, Sproul upheld that church discipline is necessary to maintain holiness within the community of faith. Discipline is not about judgmentalism but about reverence for God and love for His people: A holy God requires a holy people—and that means confronting sin, calling for repentance, and restoring the sinner in grace.

For R.C. Sproul, the Church exists to display the holiness of God to a watching world. The Church is not perfect, but it has been cleansed by Christ, called to walk in truth, purity, and reverence. When the Church loses sight of God's holiness, it loses its purpose. But when it worships, lives, and speaks in the fear of the Lord—it shines with the beauty of Christ.[8]

The concept of holiness and separation from the world is not merely a moral idea, but the very essence of what it means to belong to God. In Scripture, this separation is a declaration of our identity and worth, not based on human merit, but grounded in our calling as representatives of Christ in a fallen world. To be holy is

[8] RC Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 197.

to be set apart—not in isolation or superiority—but for the purpose of bearing witness to God's truth and grace. It is a separation unto service, not escape from responsibility.

This is why Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, describes His followers as "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13–14). These two metaphors—salt and light—capture the essential role of the church in society. Salt preserves from decay; light dispels darkness. In a world corrupted by sin and confusion, the church is uniquely positioned to point people to the truth, to restrain moral decay through godly influence, and to shine the light of Christ's love and righteousness in the midst of spiritual darkness.

Only the church, as the redeemed people of God, is divinely empowered to fulfill this role. No government, no institution, no movement can replace the church in this mission. The world is in moral and spiritual crisis—not merely needing reform, but redemption—and the presence of a holy and faithful church is the key witness to the reality of God's kingdom.

It is therefore imperative that society recognizes the vital role of the church, not as a cultural artifact or religious tradition, but as a living testimony to God's redeeming grace. When the church lives in true holiness, distinct from the world yet engaged for its sake, it gives true meaning, moral clarity, and direction to a generation drifting without purpose. This is the church's calling: to

live set apart, not as irrelevant outcasts, but as beacons of truth and agents of God's preserving grace in a world desperately in need of both.

We must be decisive and intentional in these critical times, ensuring that every effort we make for the kingdom of God is truly valuable and not wasted. As we look around us today, we see a world increasingly overwhelmed by sin. There is a tragic loss of distinction between what is holy and what is profane. Many live as though life is merely about existence—pursuing comfort, pleasure, and temporary gain—while neglecting the sobering truth that there is a life after this, a coming judgment, and an eternal destiny awaiting every soul.

In such a time, if the church begins to blend itself with the patterns and fashions of this fallen world, who then will shine the light for those walking in darkness? Who will serve as a preservative, slowing down the decay of society and pointing people to true life in Christ? It is a terrifying thought that the very institution ordained by God to stand as light and salt might lose its distinctiveness and relevance by conforming to the world rather than transforming it.

This is why we must be serious in our understanding of God—our concept of Him shapes everything else. When we have a high view of God's holiness, justice, and mercy, our lives, worship, and mission will reflect that reverence. The Word of God must remain our compass, the source of truth that guides not only our personal lives

but the collective witness of the church. For it is the very role and calling of the church to uphold truth, preach Christ, and live as witnesses to His saving grace.

How I long for the churches that have drifted—those that preach without declaring Jesus, those that gather without making Him the center—to awaken from spiritual slumber. Oh, that they would return to the task of exalting Christ above all, making Him known and glorified in every sermon, every ministry, and every act of service. For only then can the church fulfill its God-given role as a beacon of hope in a dying and confused world.

But I would say that this church God prepared for us was begun from eternity, it was in the mind of God, it was a special project of the Godhead, where the life and death of Jesus cause this to exist, we should not set aside this truth, but let us thank and glorify God that we belong to this great and holy calling. It is not by our own merit, wisdom, or strength that we are part of His church, but purely by His grace. We have been graciously included in the body of Christ, and this is a privilege far greater than anything this world can offer. We are part of something eternal, something that Christ Himself purchased by His own blood.

God's expectation of us, therefore, is not based on human performance or religious striving, but is firmly grounded in the finished work of Christ on Calvary. It was at the cross that our identity was secured, our sins

forgiven, and our mission defined. The church must never drift away from this truth, for the truth of the gospel is not just our foundation—it is our very life. The moment we let go of the centrality of Christ's work, we lose our power, our direction, and our purpose.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the church—not as a distant influence, but as the very breath and life of God within His people. It is the Spirit who empowers, sanctifies, convicts, comforts, and unites us in one body. Without the Holy Spirit, the church becomes a lifeless institution; but with Him, it becomes a living temple, radiant with God's presence and purpose.

Each member of the body has been entrusted with spiritual gifts—not for personal display or self-promotion, but for the edification and growth of the whole church. We are called to serve one another in love, to build each other up in faith, and to reflect the character of Christ in every area of life. When each part of the body works together in harmony and dependence on the Spirit, the church grows—not just in number, but in maturity, holiness, and impact.

This is what it means to be the church of the living God: a people redeemed by Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, anchored in truth, and united for His glory.

What Happens When the Church Becomes Like the World?

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As we have previously discussed, the biblical picture of the church as revealed in the Word of God is deeply sacred, not merely in name or tradition, but in its very role and function. The church is not a human invention, but a divine institution—set apart by God, purchased by the blood of Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is called to be a vessel of holiness, truth, and grace in a world darkened by sin.

Every true believer who belongs to this body can find security and assurance, knowing that Christ Himself is the head of the church. Under His lordship, each member is being equipped and sanctified for the fulfillment of God's eternal redemptive plan. The church, then, is not simply a place of gathering, but a spiritual organism, a community where God works out His purposes in and through His people.

However, when the church—the very instrument chosen to be a channel of God's blessings to the nations—begins to imitate the spirit of this age, adopting the fashions, values, and philosophies of the world, it forfeits its power and distinctiveness. Its essence becomes blurred, and instead of being a clear light in the darkness, it becomes a dim and confusing echo of the culture it was meant to confront.

This compromise leads to spiritual frustration and theological ambiguity. The message becomes diluted, the mission becomes unclear, and the people lose sight of their true identity in Christ. The church was never meant

to blend in, but to stand out in holiness, in truth, and in love. Its calling is not to entertain or conform, but to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Let us then remember that the church, as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), must remain faithful to her identity. The world does not need a church that imitates it—it needs a church that reflects Christ.

So I must strongly emphasize this truth: the moment the church begins to resemble the world, it forfeits its identity and power. The very fountain of hope it was meant to provide to a lost and dying world becomes polluted and shallow. Instead of pointing sinners to eternal realities, the church now merely offers temporal aspirations—messages of self-improvement, prosperity, and comfort, rather than repentance, faith, and the glory of God.

When the church no longer stands in contrast to the world, sin is no longer confronted as the great enemy of holy living. Instead, it becomes a companion of pleasure, silently accepted, cleverly justified, or even celebrated in the name of cultural relevance and human freedom. In such a condition, God is no longer feared, worshiped, or obeyed as the sovereign and holy Lord; He becomes merely a figment of imagination, a vague concept of personal belief rather than the living God revealed in Scripture.

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Worse still, when the Word of God is no longer upheld as the final authority for righteous living, the people of God are left to their own devices, relying on personal initiative, emotional sentiment, or cultural norms to settle what is right or wrong. The moral compass shifts from divine revelation to human reasoning, and the result is spiritual confusion, compromise, and collapse.

This is not a far-off possibility—it is the tragic and imaginable reality when the church no longer functions as the body of Christ in the world. When the church ceases to be the distinct people of God, it loses its power to save, to sanctify, and to speak truth. It becomes a shadow of its calling, a shell without life, a lamp without light.

The world does not need a church that looks like itself. It needs a church that looks like Christ—holy, bold, loving, and uncompromising in truth. Let us, therefore, tremble at the thought of drifting from our identity and plead for the Spirit of God to revive His church again, that we may shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15).

But then we are left with an urgent and sobering question: How can we distinguish the true church of Christ from the many false religions and heretical groups circulating in our communities today? The world is filled with religious noise—many groups claim to follow Christ, yet their Christ is not the Christ of Scripture, but

a redefined, minimized, or even reinvented version that suits human desires rather than the glory of God.

What, then, makes the difference between their "Christ" and our Christ? It is not in the use of His name alone, but in the truth of His person and work as revealed in the inspired Word of God. The true Christ is not merely a teacher, healer, or moral example—He is the eternal Son of God, crucified for sinners, risen in power, reigning as Lord, and returning in glory. To know the true Christ is to proclaim the gospel of grace, rooted in His substitutionary atonement and sovereign lordship.

But how can we perform faithful evangelism—especially in a world saturated with false teachings—if we ourselves are not serious about our divine calling as the church? If we treat our mission lightly, if we fail to be rooted in sound doctrine and holiness, how then can we bear the truth of Christ to a world drowning in deception? Evangelism is not merely sharing information—it is declaring truth with conviction, backed by lives that display the transforming power of that truth.

One thing is painfully clear: if the church compromises, it loses its effectiveness and dignity. When we dilute the gospel, imitate the world, or tolerate falsehood, we lose the very treasure entrusted to us—Christ Himself. We may still bear the name "church," but we have forfeited the weight of that name. Without the true Christ at the

center, we become no different from the world's religions—powerless, shallow, and misleading.

The call, therefore, is to return to Christ, to be serious and sober about our identity as His body. We must proclaim the uncompromised gospel, stand firm on the authority of Scripture, and live holy lives that reflect the glory of the Savior. Only then can the world see the difference between the church of Christ and the counterfeit, and only then will our witness be marked with spiritual power and dignity worthy of His name.

Before I bring this section to a close, I find it necessary to reaffirm a foundational truth—one that comes from the very lips of our Lord Jesus Christ regarding the true nature of the church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared: "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Let us reflect deeply on this statement. The first truth we must underscore is that the church is personally and sovereignly established by Christ Himself. This is not a man-made institution, nor a religious idea conceived out of human wisdom or necessity. The concept of the church, as Christ presented it, is rooted in God's eternal covenant, determined before the foundation of the world. It is not a redundant religious formality; it is the very outworking of the divine plan of redemption.

Since the church is built by Christ, we can be absolutely assured that it is perfect in design, pleasing to God, and

established on unshakable foundations. Christ did not leave its formation to apostles, traditions, or institutions—He claimed it as "my church", taking ownership and responsibility for its existence, growth, and mission. It is His possession, His bride, His body.

The second truth emphasized in this glorious promise is that Christ guarantees the church's holiness and preservation. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This is no small promise. It speaks of the fierce opposition the church would face in the world—opposition from sin, Satan, false doctrines, persecution, corruption, and every conceivable spiritual attack. And yet, none of these forces can overpower or contaminate the church in its true and spiritual identity.

Christ preserves the purity of His church, not through human efforts, but by His Spirit, His Word, and His unchanging grace. The world may try to conform the church to its ways, but the true church remains distinct—holy, undefiled, and victorious. That is how Christ describes it—in a superlative manner, with unwavering certainty and divine authority.

So, as we reflect on what it means to be the church in these critical times, let us not be discouraged by outward decline or growing apostasy. The true church stands unshaken, for it rests not on man's ideas but on the rock of divine revelation—the truth of who Christ is. He is the Founder, the Foundation, and the Faithful Shepherd who

will present His church, without spot or wrinkle, before the throne of God in glory.

Recovering the Distinctiveness of the Church Through the Word

Earlier, I raised a crucial question: How can we distinguish the true church of Christ from among the many heretical groups and religious assemblies that flood our communities? Now, we take the time to address this, and we must do so using the Word of God as our ultimate standard, our plumb line for all evaluation. The Scriptures alone can rightly define what the church truly is, what it believes, how it lives, and whom it exalts.

As we observe the current religious landscape, it is clear that churches are sprouting everywhere—some large, some small, meeting in grand buildings, storefronts, or even inside shopping malls. At first glance, many of these gatherings seem admirable. Their community involvement, lively programs, and packed services often leave the impression that they are doing something meaningful. People naturally assume that their visibility and influence in society must reflect spiritual significance.

But when we look more closely—when we examine them in the light of God's Word—an important question arises: Is this truly the church of God? Is this assembly really drawing people nearer to Christ? Are they growing

in godliness, truth, and Christlikeness? Or are they simply offering a form of religion without power (cf. 2 Tim. 3:5)?

God has not left us blind in such matters. He has given His people the gift of discernment through the Spirit and the Scriptures. Therefore, we are not being judgmental when we question, test, and evaluate. We are being faithful. The danger is real—and many sincere seekers of God are being led astray by attractive but deceptive ministries that lack the true gospel and Christ-centered doctrine.

The apostle Paul warned of such times in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, ”Evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed…All Scripture is God breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good works.”

This is the key: We must evaluate all things by the Scripture. The true church is not known by its popularity, size, or programs—but by its fidelity to the Word of God, its exaltation of Christ, and its pursuit of holiness. The marks of a true church include the pure preaching of the gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of church discipline. Without these, even the most active or admired congregation may not be a true church at all.

As we move forward, let us urge believers to test all things, not by emotion or external appearance, but by the enduring truth of God's Word. This is not just an academic pursuit; it is a pastoral responsibility and a spiritual safeguard for those who earnestly seek to know and follow the true Christ.

Filipino Devotion to the Church: A Heartfelt Zeal in Need of Gospel Clarity

In the religious landscape of the Philippines, one cannot deny the deep emotional connection and passionate commitment many Filipinos have toward the Church. Their intimacy with religious life is evident in how they express personal convictions about the Church's purpose, dignity, and role in society. For many, the Church is not just a building or an institution—it is part of their identity, their family tradition, and even their hope for the afterlife.

This passion becomes especially visible during remarkable occasions such as the Lenten season, Christmas celebrations, and local patronal festivities. During these times, churches are filled with people eager to participate in processions, Masses, and other rituals. These religious events stir up profound emotions, creating a sense of belonging and reverence. It reveals that, for many Filipinos, the Church is seen as a sacred place to which they can turn at any time for spiritual help. Whether in times of joy or distress, they feel the

Church is always there to meet their spiritual needs—like a sanctuary that never closes its doors.

Such devotion reflects a sincere desire to stay connected with something divine. It demonstrates how reverence for the Church is woven into the Filipino way of life, often passed down through generations. Many would even say they remain faithful members of the Church no matter what, because to leave it would feel like a betrayal of their heritage and their faith.

However, beneath this commendable reverence lies a spiritual concern that cannot be overlooked. While many profess a strong connection to the Church, the substance of that connection is often shallow. For a significant number, religious affiliation has become more cultural than spiritual—more about identity than transformation. The danger lies in the belief that simply "belonging" to the Church, or participating in its activities during feast days, is enough to secure one's spiritual standing.

This is where a tragic misstep occurs. In the midst of so much religious enthusiasm, the clear preaching of the gospel is often absent or drowned out by tradition and emotion. Many are content with religious forms—attending church, saying prayers, lighting candles—without understanding the heart of the Christian message: that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

This is, I believe, one of the greatest challenges facing the Filipino Church today. The gospel is not clearly heard, not because people are uninterested, but because they are already satisfied with what they have—a form of religion without the power of true redemption. They do not hunger for more because they think they already have enough.

As shepherds and stewards of God's Word, we must lovingly expose this superficiality not to condemn, but to call our people into the fullness of the gospel. Our task is not simply to affirm religious sincerity, but to point them beyond it—toward Christ, the only source of true life and lasting hope.

The Filipino Identity: A Nation Shaped by Devotion and Tradition

Our identity as a nation has long captured the attention of the world, particularly because of our steadfast admiration and loyalty to religion. This deep spiritual attachment is not merely institutional or ceremonial—it flows naturally into the culture, beliefs, and daily lives of individual Filipinos. Religion is not seen as separate from life, but as the very thread that weaves together family, community, and personal identity.

In many parts of the country, especially in the barrios and barangays, the rhythm of life is marked by religious observance, community participation, and a strong sense of belonging. Socialization often revolves around the

Church or religious festivities, and devotion to both God and neighbor is treated not merely as a private conviction, but as a shared cultural heritage. Unity is not only an ideal; it is a lived experience, especially during celebrations like fiestas, processions, and public gatherings tied to religious events. These moments serve as both spiritual expressions and opportunities for social cohesion.

However, behind this unity lies a complex dynamic: a certain apathy toward critical reflection or change. This apathy is not born out of ignorance, but out of deep emotional investment in tradition. Filipinos have a strong affection for their neighbors, and a deep respect for the practices handed down to them. As a result, any attempt to challenge or reform these customs—especially when it touches on religious practices or community traditions—is often met with resistance. One does not simply question these traditions without encountering emotional, cultural, and even spiritual opposition.

Such is the power of devotion in the Filipino heart. Whether that devotion is directed toward religious icons, age-old customs, or interpersonal loyalty, it forms a bond that is not easily broken. To question these things is often perceived not just as a critique of ideas, but as a betrayal of identity and unity. This is why reforming beliefs or introducing the gospel in its pure biblical form can feel like fighting against all odds.

And yet, as people of the gospel, we must lovingly and patiently bring the light of Christ into these deeply rooted cultural patterns. Our goal is not to destroy the Filipino heart of devotion, but to redirect it—to anchor it not in tradition for tradition's sake, but in the unchanging truth of God's Word. Only then can our identity as a nation be shaped not merely by religious admiration, but by the transforming power of the gospel.

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CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN THE GOSPEL IS HIDDEN:

THE STRATEGY OF SATAN

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We have now come to a point where we must soberly reflect on the profound importance of the Church of Christ and the gospel being inextricably bound together. These two—Christ's Church and His gospel—are not merely religious concepts but divine instruments, joined by God to bring true hope to a lost and dying world. Their emergence into human history is not incidental; it is essential for the redemption of sinners. The proclamation of the gospel and the presence of the Church in the world serve a divine and eternal purpose: to call the elect to salvation and to glorify Christ in all things.

Securing our eternal destiny is not a human achievement but a work of the Holy Spirit, applied through the preaching of the gospel. It is through the Spirit's effectual calling and the Church's faithful witness that God's redemptive plan is brought to its appointed end. The Church, as the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), is called to guard, preserve, and proclaim this gospel without compromise. In doing so, she fulfills her sacred duty in God's unfolding drama of redemption.

However, the grim reality we face today is this: the clarity of the gospel has been distorted in the eyes of many. This blurring is not merely the result of human ignorance or indifference; rather, it is the fruit of a much darker opposition. The unwavering and strategic commitment of the devil to obscure the truth of the gospel has sown confusion, deception, and spiritual

blindness. As Paul writes, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV). This is not a passive resistance—it is an aggressive campaign to distort the gospel, silence the Church, and hinder the saving work of God.

In light of this, the Church must rise in holy resolve. She must not retreat in the face of spiritual warfare but stand firm with the full armor of God, driven by the assurance that Christ will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). The gospel must be made plain again—clear, uncompromised, and Christ-centered. For only through this gospel can true hope be found, and only through the Spirit-empowered Church can the light shine into the darkness.

What Is Truly Happening within the Church Landscape Today?

Have you ever wondered why so many churches are being established today? It's as if every corner of our barangays is now occupied by a different church. In some places, I have personally observed that just a meter away from the wall of one church, another church building is already being constructed. The proximity resembles more of a competitive business setup rather than a unified spiritual endeavor—it looks more like a pre-enterprise concept than a gospel-centered movement.

At first glance, one might think that the growth of churches is a sign of spiritual revival. And truly, if these efforts were born out of a genuine desire to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we would have every reason to rejoice. But we must ask: is Christ truly the center of these efforts? Or is there another agenda—one rooted in self-interest, personal ambition, or even denominational pride? The painful truth is that many churches today are not being founded for the glory of God, but for the elevation of man.

This growing landscape of churches, however, presents us with a sobering challenge: how do we distinguish the true Church of Christ from the countless others that merely bear His name? It is no longer uncommon to see church signages boldly displaying the name of Jesus, promising hope, healing, and purpose. But when we step inside and listen, we are often met not with the powerful exposition of God's Word, but with diluted messages, man-centered preaching, and feel-good teachings that lack the substance of biblical truth. There is little that distinguishes the preaching in many of these places from motivational talks or psychological self-help sessions.

Sadly, this is not just a matter of doctrinal error—it is a matter of spiritual blindness. Many churches promote themselves using the name of Christ but fail to preach the real Christ. As Paul warned, "If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed… you put up with it readily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

The danger is real: the name of Jesus is being used, but the true gospel of grace is being lost in the noise.

Therefore, we are called to discern. Not every gathering that claims to be a church is truly part of Christ's body. The marks of a true church—faithful preaching of the Word, right administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline—must guide our judgment. The Church of Christ is not identified by its number, popularity, or aesthetics, but by its faithfulness to the gospel, its submission to the Lordship of Christ, and its commitment to proclaim Him crucified and risen.

Despite the overwhelming trends we see today concerning the rapid multiplication of churches in every corner of our communities, we can still find great confidence and assurance in the distinctiveness of the true Church of Jesus Christ. Amid the confusion, imitation, and doctrinal compromise that characterizes many modern gatherings, there remains a remnant—a people who faithfully uphold the gospel of grace, administer the sacraments in obedience to Christ, and live under the authority of God's Word. This true Church does not merely exist in name; it stands as a beacon of truth in a world filled with spiritual noise.

In every generation, God preserves His Church. He remains sovereign over the gospel. No matter how widespread deception may be, no matter how powerful the influence of false teaching becomes, the gospel of Christ will not be silenced. Just as in the time of the Old

Testament, when the prophet Elijah stood alone against the hundreds of false prophets of Baal, the truth of God triumphed. While it seemed that Elijah was isolated, outnumbered, and overwhelmed, the Lord made it known that His Word would prevail. Fire from heaven confirmed the true God, and the false prophets were exposed and defeated (1 Kings 18).

Our present time bears a similar resemblance. The religious landscape feels like a competition—a marketplace of doctrines, where truth and error are often indistinguishable to the undiscerning eye. Churches may rise quickly, attract crowds, and gain popularity, yet many do so without a clear and faithful proclamation of the gospel. But like Elijah's moment on Mount Carmel, we believe that this contest will not end in confusion. Truth has a voice—and it will not be silenced. The gospel of Christ, though often ignored or misrepresented, carries within it the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The faithful Church must not grow weary. We are not called to outshine the false, but to outlast them—by holding fast to the Word of life, come what may.

Let us take heart: God has always preserved a faithful remnant. He is not surprised by the spread of counterfeit churches. He is sovereign over the gospel and will ensure that His truth will shine in the midst of darkness. As Scripture says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah

40:8). In this assurance, we rest. We do not fight for victory—we fight from victory, knowing that the truth shall ultimately prevail.

It could very well be that one of the subtle yet destructive strategies of the devil in our time is to shift the focus away from the truth of the gospel by overemphasizing the activity of church planting without grounding it in the message of Christ crucified. Church planting, in and of itself, is not wrong—it is, in fact, biblical when done under the lordship of Christ and centered on the gospel. But the enemy is crafty. He knows that if he can replace the gospel with mere institutional expansion, he can render the Church powerless, even while appearing active and growing.

The deception lies in the subtle replacement of gospel urgency with organizational ambition. Instead of asking, "Are we proclaiming the truth of Christ?" Many leaders today are more concerned with the questions, "How fast are we expanding?" or "How many churches can we plant under our banner?" This shift in focus reveals a troubling reality: not all who are planting churches today are anchored in the truth of the gospel. Many are driven not by a call to preach the whole counsel of God, but by a desire to propagate their denomination, grow their influence, or fulfill a religious program.

The result is a tragic distortion of priorities. Rather than laboring for the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls, some are unintentionally advancing

human-centered agendas. The preaching of the Word is sidelined, replaced with programs and branding strategies. Evangelism becomes less about calling sinners to repentance and faith, and more about gathering members into a particular religious group. The message of the cross is drowned out by the noise of institutional promotion.

This reality is increasingly obvious today. We see churches rising in number but declining in doctrinal depth. We see leaders multiplying yet lacking theological clarity. The enemy is pleased when churches exist in form but not in substance—when the structure is present, but Christ is absent from the center.

We must discern the times. Church planting must never replace gospel preaching. The mission of the Church is not merely to establish buildings or networks, but to proclaim the life-giving message of Christ, crucified and risen. As Paul declared, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Any movement, no matter how fast it spreads, that does not make this its foundation, is building on sand.

The Church must return to its roots—not in numbers or visibility, but in faithfulness to the truth. For in the end, it is not the size of our network that matters, but the purity of our message. Let us guard the gospel from all distractions, remembering that Satan's most effective weapon is not always persecution, but distortion.

Understanding the Tragedy of Modern Deception

There is ultimately one fundamental reason why so many people today are being deceived—it is the lack of true knowledge about God. This spiritual ignorance is not a neutral condition; it is a fertile ground for the devil's schemes. Satan uses this absence of knowledge to darken the minds and hearts of people, keeping them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. As the prophet Hosea declared long ago, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). And this truth is just as relevant in our context today.

In the Filipino setting, this ignorance does not usually manifest itself as open rebellion or explicit denial of God. Rather, it comes in a more subtle form—through religious sincerity without biblical understanding. Many Filipinos attend church, pray, and even speak of God with reverence. It would not be wrong to say that, culturally, the heart of the Filipino is inclined toward godliness or has a sense of fear of the Lord. However, this external religiosity often masks a deeper problem: the ignorance of who God truly is according to His Word.

Worshiping God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) is not merely about sincerity or emotion—it requires correct knowledge of God as revealed in Scripture. Unfortunately, many are worshiping not according to truth but according to tradition, emotion, or human invention. And this is not just a problem outside the

Church—it has found its way into the very heart of the evangelical movement in the Philippines.

In many evangelical churches today, there is an abundance of activity—worship services, conferences, prayer meetings, and religious events fill the calendar. Believers are active, passionate, and committed. Yet, in the midst of all this spiritual movement, there is often a devastating absence of sound doctrine. The Word of God is preached, but not rightly divided. The message of the cross is mentioned, but not clearly explained. Christ is named, but not truly known.

This is the great tragedy. The evangelical church, though once known for its commitment to Scripture, is slowly being blinded—not by external persecution but by internal neglect. The devil does not need to destroy these churches with violence; he only needs to keep them distracted, shallow, and busy. He has made the gospel vague, distorted its focus, and replaced deep theological preaching with superficial motivational messages.

To be ignorant of God is to be ignorant of His Word. And to be ignorant of the Word is to be vulnerable to every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). This is why discernment is needed more than ever. The Church must awaken to this reality: busyness is not a substitute for faithfulness, and emotion is not a replacement for truth. If we are to see true revival in our land, it must begin with a return to the knowledge of God through His Word and the clear preaching of Christ crucified.

Only then will the light of the gospel shine again in the midst of darkness—and only then will the Filipino church recover its true calling, not merely as a religious institution, but as the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

The Hidden Cost of a Blurred Gospel

It has become increasingly clear that one of the devil's most effective strategies in our time is his quiet and calculated infiltration of the church—not by outright opposition, but by gradually hollowing out its understanding of the gospel. He accomplishes this by shifting the focus of the church away from the centrality of Christ and toward superficial goals: rapid expansion, increasing attendance, growing influence, and tailoring messages to suit the preferences of people rather than confronting them with the demands of the cross. The enemy is content to let the church grow numerically, as long as it grows apart from the truth.

The gospel, once the blazing center of the church's life and message, is now being reduced in many places to a footnote—mentioned occasionally, but rarely explained with depth and conviction. In its place, we hear sermons centered on human potential, personal success, emotional comfort, and worldly relevance. Christ is no longer the focus, but the crowd. Truth is no longer the goal, but attendance. The pulpit has become a platform not for heralding the Word of God, but for entertaining

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or inspiring people without confronting their sin or pointing them to the only Savior.

And so, the sobering question arises: what kind of church is this becoming? What tragic effect does such a church have—not only upon the community it serves, but also upon itself? From the outside, everything may appear successful. To the unbelieving world, this kind of church seems relevant, attractive, and well-integrated into society. The programs are polished, the music is excellent, and the atmosphere is welcoming. There appears to be a smooth and uninterrupted flow of ministry, outreach, and activity. But behind the scenes—beneath the surface—the consequences are spiritually devastating.

The long-term effect is not measured in how many seats are filled today, but in how many souls are lost tomorrow. A church that no longer preaches Christ faithfully is no longer a light in the darkness, but a dim reflection of the world. The community may be impressed by the church's presence, but if it does not hear the gospel, it remains eternally unchanged. Worse still, the church itself may be deceived into thinking that numerical success equals spiritual faithfulness.

But God is not mocked. A Christless Christianity is no Christianity at all. A church that fails to proclaim the gospel with clarity and urgency is not fulfilling her mission, no matter how active or impressive she may seem. As Paul warned in Galatians 1:6–9, even if an

angel from heaven were to preach a different gospel, let him be accursed. That is how serious the matter is. To preach a gospel centered on man rather than Christ is to abandon the very foundation upon which the Church stands.

The eternal consequence of this deception is horrifying: people will live their whole lives attending church, participating in religious activities, and yet remain outside the kingdom of God. They will have been given religion, but not regeneration; inspiration, but not salvation. And on the day of judgment, many will say, "Lord, Lord," only to hear the tragic words, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22–23).

This is why the Church must awaken to her calling—to proclaim Christ, and Him crucified. The true Church is not built on crowds, but on truth. Not on strategies, but on the Spirit. And not on man, but on Christ, the solid Rock.

In addition to all these realities, we must not overlook a painful but urgent truth: many will not inherit eternal life—not because they have openly rejected the gospel, but because they were never truly confronted with it in the first place. Their spiritual leaders, instead of guiding them into the deep riches of Christ's redeeming grace, have only led them into shallow emotional experiences and man-centered religion. These leaders, whether knowingly or not, have prioritized quantity over quality—counting numbers rather than cultivating true

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discipleship, pursuing crowds rather than shepherding souls.

This is not a light matter. It is a tragic reality with eternal consequences. The people under such leadership are not being prepared to meet Christ as their Savior and Lord—they are being left vulnerable to meet Him only as their Righteous Judge. And on that day, all shallowness, all pretense, and all religious activity devoid of truth will be exposed. Many will cry out, "Lord, Lord," recalling their church attendance, their ministries, and their zeal—but Christ will say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). What a dreadful moment it will be for those who lived religious lives but were never born again.

This spiritual blindness must be taken seriously. It cannot be brushed aside as a difference in preference or methodology. It is not merely about style or structure—it is about salvation. What is at stake is not temporary success but eternal destiny. And if the shepherds are blind, the flock will surely be led astray.

This is why our calling today is not merely to reform religious practice, but to engage in a gospel-centered transformation and a spiritual revolution. This transformation begins with a return to the truth—the truth of who Christ is, what He has done, and what He demands. The Church must rise to its God-ordained task: to call people not just to attend services or join movements, but to repent, believe, and be conformed to

the image of Christ. This revolution must be demonstrated not in emotional hype or church expansion alone, but in the faithful preaching of the Word, the fearless call to holiness, and the unshakable hope in the gospel of grace.

The time is now. We are not called to entertain, but to proclaim. We are not called to appease, but to awaken. The gospel must be preached in its fullness—not diluted for popularity, not softened for acceptance, but declared with conviction and clarity. For only the truth can save, and only Christ can transform.

The Impact of This Sad Tragedy in the World

We have already considered the devil's subtle yet devastating strategy of deceiving the Church of Christ by blinding her eyes and causing her to drift away from the gospel. This spiritual drift may appear harmless on the surface, but its consequences are eternally tragic. A church that loses sight of Christ and His finished work no longer functions as the light of the world or the salt of the earth. Instead, it becomes an echo of the world's own confusion.

But beyond the eternal consequences within the Church, today we shift our focus to the broader damage this deception brings to the world at large. When the gospel is no longer clearly preached, when Christ is no longer

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exalted, and when sin is no longer confronted, the world is left in increasing darkness. The gospel is the only true light for a lost world (John 8:12), and when that light is dimmed or distorted within the Church, the result is societal decay, moral chaos, and spiritual ruin. The world depends on the faithful proclamation of the Church—not just for religious stability, but for eternal truth.

In this light, we turn again to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, where our Lord Jesus vividly describes two contrasting paths: the wide way that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13–14). This is no mere moral illustration—it is a divine warning, a spiritual map drawn by the Savior Himself to reveal the nature of true discipleship. Christ, in His mercy, uses this figure of speech not only to instruct His followers, but also to caution the entire world. The two paths represent two destinies—and there is no middle ground.

The wide road, accommodating and popular, appears smooth and welcoming, but it ends in destruction. This road is tragically attractive to many because it demands no repentance, no submission, and no true knowledge of Christ. It is the path offered by false religion, cultural Christianity, and churches that have lost the gospel. The narrow road, on the other hand, is difficult and often despised—but it alone leads to life. It is the way of the cross, the way of grace, the way of truth.

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The danger Christ points out is not simply that the wide road exists—but that many walk on it thinking they are safe. Many think they are walking with God because they are religious, involved in church, or connected to Christian traditions. Yet if their faith is not grounded in the true gospel—if it is not anchored in the person and work of Christ alone—they are walking toward judgment while believing they are walking toward life.

This warning is especially important in our generation, where the line between truth and error has been blurred by emotion, pragmatism, and false teaching. The spiritual damage caused by a blurred gospel is not only invisible at first—it is often celebrated by the world. Churches are applauded for being "relevant," "inclusive," and "non-offensive," yet in doing so they often abandon the very truth that can save. The result is not revival, but ruin.

Therefore, Christ's words in Matthew 7 remain urgently relevant. They are not merely ancient teachings, but divine truth spoken to a world in peril. The Church must wake up. We must ask ourselves: Are we guiding people to the narrow gate? Or are we silently affirming them on the wide road? The damage done to the world by a compromised gospel is real—and only a return to the clear, Christ-centered gospel can restore light to the darkness.

Because of this, it becomes increasingly evident that the way many professing Christians live is no longer distinct

from the world. Their conduct, values, and pursuits reflect more of the spirit of the age than the Spirit of God. There is little to no distinction in their speech, ambitions, or relationships. They blend so seamlessly with the patterns of this world that their lives no longer bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel. This is not merely a problem of behavior—it is a reflection of a deeper spiritual issue: their minds have not been renewed, and their hearts have not been regenerated by the Spirit of God.

No one dares speak boldly about the gospel. There is a growing silence when it comes to sin, repentance, and the necessity of new birth. The language of the cross has been replaced with the language of comfort and positivity. Sermons are designed to entertain or soothe rather than to confront and convict. As a result, people remain unchanged. They may be religiously active, emotionally engaged, or even loyal to a church community—but spiritually, they remain dead in their sins.

This, then, is the inevitable outcome of a Christless church. The true gospel is not being preached, and therefore, true conversions are not taking place. The effect is not immediately obvious to the natural eye. There may still be energy, activity, and noise. But from heaven's perspective, it is a spiritual wasteland.

The tragedy of such a church cannot be overstated. When Christ is no longer at the center—when the cross

is no longer proclaimed and the Word of God is no longer exalted—the church loses its power to transform lives. What remains is a form of godliness that denies its power (2 Timothy 3:5). The community may continue to gather, but it no longer grows in grace. It no longer shines as light in a dark world. It becomes just another institution blending into the culture, rather than confronting it with truth.

And so, while the consequences may not seem immediate or dramatic, they are deeply tragic. A church without Christ is a church without life. A message without the gospel is a message without hope. And a people without regeneration are a people heading toward eternal separation from God—even while thinking they are spiritually safe.

This is why the call for reformation must be sounded once more. The Church must return to Christ—not merely in name, but in message, in worship, and in mission. For only in Him is there life, and only through Him can the Church fulfill her holy calling in this dark and dying world.

Common Distortions of the Gospel in Filipino Churches

What evidence do I present to prove that the gospel is being distorted in our time? One of the clearest and most widespread distortions lies in the misuse and misrepresentation of human free will by many preachers

and church leaders. This is not a minor doctrinal disagreement—it strikes at the heart of the gospel itself. The way free will is taught and emphasized by many today often shifts the focus away from the sovereign grace of God and centers it instead on the ability of man. And in doing so, it redefines the gospel from being a divine rescue of helpless sinners to a mere offer that man must activate by his own choice.

Now, I am fully aware that the debate about free will is not new. It has stretched across centuries, from the time of Augustine and Pelagius, to the Reformation clash between Martin Luther and Erasmus, and continues to be discussed among theologians in the modern era. But let me be clear: my goal here is not to win an argument about who is right or wrong based on philosophical reasoning or denominational traditions. Instead, I appeal solely to the clarity and authority of Scripture.

When it comes to the doctrine of free will, many pastors and teachers fail not because they are ill-intentioned, but because they have not carefully and faithfully handled the Word of God. They often assume that man's will is naturally free to choose God, ignoring what the Bible clearly teaches about the condition of fallen humanity. Scripture tells us that man, apart from Christ, is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), enslaved to sin (Romans 6:17), unable to submit to God's law (Romans 8:7–8), and blind to the glory of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). These are not merely

weaknesses—they are spiritual impossibilities apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

This is why I have chosen to address this topic first. Many misunderstand the nature of free will, and this misunderstanding leads to a flawed gospel presentation. If people believe they can come to Christ by their own power, the message shifts from God's sovereign grace to man's initiative. It becomes a gospel of self-effort rather than a gospel of divine mercy. And if the foundation of the gospel is altered, everything else collapses.

Therefore, we must return to the Scriptures—not to abstract debate, but to the clear testimony of God's Word. The gospel is not about helping people make better choices—it is about God raising the spiritually dead, opening blind eyes, and granting repentance and faith as gifts of grace (John 6:44, Philippians 1:29, Acts 11:18). When we distort this by exalting man's ability over God's sovereignty, we rob the gospel of its power and shift the glory from Christ to man.

This is one of the most dangerous distortions facing the Church today. It is subtle, it sounds appealing, but it empties the gospel of its saving power. That is why we must expose it, confront it with the truth of Scripture, and lovingly call the Church back to the doctrines of grace—where the gospel shines in its full beauty, and Christ is exalted as the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Here is the explanation of Augustine about free will that was mentioned by RC Sproul: Sproul emphasizes Augustine's distinction between liberum arbitrium (free will) and libertas (true moral freedom). Augustine affirmed that after the Fall:

- Humanity retains free will in the sense that we can make choices without external compulsion.

- But we lose moral freedom: fallen humans can sin (posse peccare), but cannot avoid sinning (non posse non peccare) .

- In Augustine's terms, our wills are unfree toward good—we lack the libertas to consistently choose righteousness .

Sproul also notes Augustine's idea of prevenient grace: before humans can will or do good, God must first enable our wills—liberating us from bondage so we can respond. This grace isn't optional but foundational for any righteous choice.[9]

In conclusion, Sproul highlights that for Augustine, the will of fallen man remains active but is bound to sin. True moral freedom—to choose righteousness and God—is lost in the Fall and can only be restored by

[9] RC Sproul, *Willing to Believe: Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Book House, 2004), 63.

God's sovereign grace. Without this grace, man may choose according to his desires, but his desires themselves are enslaved to sin. Therefore, only grace can free the will to love and obey God.

The second vital doctrine that is being ignored, and yet is essential to a proper understanding of the gospel, is the doctrine of total depravity. Although the specific term "total depravity" was clearly systematized and popularized by John Calvin and the Reformers, the reality it describes is not man-made—it is biblical. This doctrine refers to the true spiritual condition of man before God after the Fall. It teaches us that man is not just slightly broken or morally weak; rather, he is utterly corrupt in nature, spiritually dead, and completely incapable of saving himself.

Scripture is unmistakably clear on this. Isaiah declared, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). The apostle Paul affirmed that "There is none righteous, no, not even one… there is none who seeks after God" (Romans 3:10–11). This means that man, in his natural state, does not merely need assistance—he needs resurrection. His heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9), and his will is bound to sin unless God intervenes.

Tragically, many churches today neglect this doctrine, both in their preaching and teaching ministries. The pulpits are often silent on this sobering truth, and it is rarely addressed in discipleship or Bible study materials.

I believe one of the main reasons for this is the lack of deep scriptural grounding and a disconnection from the light of the Reformation, which once brought clarity and boldness to proclaim man's true condition before a holy God.

When the doctrine of total depravity is ignored, it produces a shallow view of sin and a superficial understanding of salvation. Without this foundation, people are left thinking they are basically good, or at least morally neutral, and that with enough effort or religious activity, they can somehow reach God. But this is far from the truth. If we fail to teach total depravity, we also fail to understand the radical nature of grace. The deeper we grasp our lostness, the more we will treasure our redemption in Christ.

This is why I believe this doctrine must return to the pulpit. Not as a cold theological point, but as a pastoral warning and gospel foundation. Our people must know the truth about who we are apart from Christ—not to shame them, but to awaken them to the magnitude of God's mercy. Only when we see ourselves as radically corrupt will we truly rejoice in a gospel that is radically gracious.

The Reformers understood this clearly. Calvin, Luther, and others did not dwell on man's depravity out of pessimism, but because they knew that the glory of the gospel shines brightest against the backdrop of man's utter ruin. The deeper the pit, the greater the miracle of

being lifted out by grace. And so, the Church today must recover this truth—not merely as a doctrine to believe, but as a reality to proclaim with urgency and clarity.

John Bunyan saw the depravity of man as a deep-rooted corruption of the human heart. In his book The Strait Gate, he wrote that man's heart is so wicked that even his supposed good deeds are stained with sin. He often emphasized that man, apart from Christ, is in a lost and helpless condition, unable to come to God on his own. Bunyan describes the sinner as one who is not only unwilling to come to Christ but also unable, unless drawn by the Spirit.

He stressed that the natural man, in his fallen state, loves sin and hates holiness, and that no amount of religious effort can change his nature unless he is born again by the Spirit of God.[10]

The Power of the True gospel to Break the Veil

It is only through the power of the gospel that a person can attain true spiritual completeness and lasting satisfaction. The gospel is not a generic message; it is the divinely crafted answer to the deepest needs of the human soul. God, in His sovereign wisdom, designed the gospel to perfectly meet the needs of those whom He has chosen—granting them forgiveness, transformation, and eternal life. This message is not only necessary but

[10] John Bunyan, *The Strait Gate* (London: Nath. Ponder, 1676), 25.

paramount for salvation, for apart from it, there is no hope of reconciliation with God.

The gospel possesses an irresistible power to overcome every barrier and break through any obstacle that stands in its way. Regardless of a person's condition—whether hardened by sin, bound by tradition, or running in rebellion—when God calls, the gospel becomes effectual. We see this clearly in the life of the apostle Paul. While on the road to Damascus, Paul was not seeking Christ; in fact, he had a completely different agenda—he was bent on persecuting Christians. Yet in that moment, the gospel powerfully invaded his life, turning a violent opposer into a chosen instrument, an ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles. That is nothing less than a miracle of sovereign grace.

The same gospel that transformed Paul is still active and powerful today. Across generations, many have experienced the breaking of spiritual chains—they have been delivered from sin, darkness, addiction, and despair. Now they live lives that are pleasing to the Lord, not because of their own effort, but because God appointed them to be His children (Eph. 1:4–5). The power of the gospel does not lie dormant; it continues to work, call, regenerate, and sanctify those whom God has set His love upon from eternity past.

But before we continue to explore the power of the gospel in its fullness, we must take a moment to look back into the Old Testament, not to exhaustively unpack

every reference, but to highlight a few foundational glimpses that reveal the gospel's ancient and eternal presence. The gospel is not merely a New Testament phenomenon—it was already present in seed form in the earliest pages of Scripture, affirming that salvation through Christ has always been at the heart of God's redemptive plan.

One of the most significant revelations of the gospel in the Old Testament was given to Abraham, the father of faith. In God's promise to Abraham, we see a foreshadowing of the gospel when He declared, "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). This blessing was not merely material or national; it pointed to the coming of the Seed—Christ—through whom salvation would be extended to all peoples. The apostle Paul confirms this when he writes, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham…" (Galatians 3:8). This shows us that the gospel is not only the centerpiece of the New Testament but also the heartbeat of the Old.

Moreover, the gospel was first proclaimed immediately after the fall of humanity. In Genesis 3:15, often referred to as the Protoevangelium or "first gospel," God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. This was a prophetic declaration of Christ's victory over Satan, a message of hope in the midst of judgment. Though Adam and Eve had rebelled,

God did not leave them without a promise of redemption. From the very beginning, He made it clear that salvation would come through a divine Deliverer.

These glimpses remind us that the gospel is not an afterthought, nor is it a backup plan. It is the eternal purpose of God (Ephesians 3:11), planned before the foundation of the world and progressively revealed throughout redemptive history. The Old Testament lays the groundwork, the New Testament brings it to light—but in every age, Christ is at the center.

To consider the lives of the people whom the gospel encountered in the New Testament is to witness undeniable evidence of its transforming power. The gospel did not move in secret, nor did it work selectively according to human standards—it demonstrated divine power among people from all walks of life, from Jewish believers to Gentile outsiders, from religious seekers to hardened persecutors.

The apostle Paul stands as one of the clearest and most powerful testimonies of this gospel's effectiveness. Once a fierce enemy of Christ and a persecutor of the church, Paul became a passionate preacher of the very message he once tried to destroy. His life was a living proclamation that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Through his preaching, many were persuaded and brought to faith—not because of his eloquence, but

because of the working of the Holy Spirit through the gospel message.

Among those deeply affected were people like Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira whose heart the Lord opened to receive the word (Acts 16:14); and Cornelius, a Roman centurion who, though devout, still needed to hear the gospel and be saved (Acts 10). These individuals, along with countless others, demonstrate that when the gospel is presented, the Spirit moves with sovereign grace, opening hearts, granting repentance, and leading sinners into obedience to Christ.

This same power is not confined to the pages of Scripture. Even in our present day, countless testimonies resound with the same theme: it is the gospel of Christ that brings deep conviction, breaks through pride and unbelief, and leads people to saving faith. Whether from a life of immorality, idolatry, or religious self-righteousness, those whom God calls are drawn by the compelling truth of the gospel, transformed by its message, and sustained by its grace.

The gospel, then, is not a historical artifact—it is a living and active power, working across time, cultures, and generations. What it accomplished in the early church, it continues to accomplish today—for the glory of Christ and the salvation of sinners.

In order for us to be firm and unwavering in our understanding of the gospel, we must uncover a critical

issue—an aspect that, if rightly considered, will startle and convict many sincere believers in Christ. While most professing Christians would readily affirm that we are saved by the power and sufficiency of the gospel, many unknowingly compromise that very truth in their methods and understanding of salvation.

We declare with conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ is sufficient—completely and powerfully adequate—to bring about the salvation of sinners. Salvation is not the result of human effort, nor is it dependent on the strength or clarity of man's decision. It is the product of God's sovereign grace, acting through the proclamation of the gospel and applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of those whom God has chosen.

However, a concerning pattern has emerged in modern evangelism. In many evangelistic approaches today, the focus has shifted from the objective power of the gospel to the subjective response of the individual. Instead of emphasizing what Christ has done, the spotlight is placed on whether or not the person has "accepted the Lord"—a phrase that subtly, but significantly, shifts the weight of salvation onto the sinner's decision.

This shift becomes apparent when evangelists present simplified gospel outlines—like the "Four Spiritual Laws"—followed by a "prayer of acceptance." After explaining basic truths about sin, salvation, and Christ's death, the evangelist then leads the hearer in a scripted prayer, often concluding with something like: "Did you

pray this prayer sincerely?" And if the person answers yes, the response is: "Then you are now born again. Welcome to the family of God."

While well-meaning, this method can unintentionally distort the gospel, because it makes salvation appear contingent upon the act of praying or the sincerity of one's decision. The emphasis is no longer on what God has done in Christ, but on what man decides at that moment. This is not the biblical gospel. This is not the message that raised Paul from blindness, nor what opened Lydia's heart, nor what caused thousands at Pentecost to cry out, "What must we do to be saved?"

What we're seeing is a modern redefinition of salvation—a gospel where man's acceptance becomes the determining factor, rather than God's sovereign grace and Christ's finished work. It ignores the reality of prevenient or effectual grace—the biblical truth that God must first act upon the sinner's heart before any true faith or repentance can occur (John 6:44; Eph. 2:4–5).

This is the common mistake in much of evangelism today: the gospel is no longer treated as the power of God unto salvation, but as a tool that waits on man's permission to become effective. In this view, man's decision takes center stage, and the Holy Spirit's regenerating work is replaced with a human formula.

What we must recover, then, is the Christ-centered, grace-driven nature of the gospel, where salvation is

seen as God's initiative from beginning to end, and where faith is not a human-generated response, but a gift given by God Himself (Phil. 1:29; Acts 13:48). Only then will our evangelism reflect the true gospel—and only then will God receive all the glory He rightly deserves.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE RELUCTANCE TOWARD REFORMATION

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We have already stated that without a true and biblical understanding of the gospel, a gathering of people—even if they call themselves a church—cannot be regarded as the true church of Christ. The gospel is not merely an entry point to Christianity; it is the very foundation, center, and heartbeat of the church's identity and mission. If the gospel is distorted, neglected, or replaced, then what remains is merely a shell—a religious institution, but not the bride of Christ.

This brings us to an important question: Why are so many churches today reluctant, even resistant, to genuine reformation? The answer lies not simply in ignorance but often in the very intention upon which those churches were founded. Many religious groups bearing the name of Christ were not formed out of a burden to align with Scripture, but rather out of human agendas, social convenience, or even doctrinal compromise. When the roots are worldly, the fruit will inevitably reflect that foundation.

It is therefore a great burden—and a God-given privilege—for us to proclaim the necessity and urgency of returning to the mind of Christ, especially in how we view the church and its practices. We must discern carefully the trends, movements, and religious expressions that claim the name of Christ, yet operate with entirely different motivations. Just because a group uses the Bible, sings worship songs, or talks about Jesus,

does not mean they are walking in the truth of the gospel.

From a biblical perspective, the church is not a mere human organization—it is a living organism, the bride of Christ, purchased by His blood and called to holiness, faithfulness, and doctrinal purity. Each member has a role to fulfill in the body, under the headship of Christ (Ephesians 4:15–16). However, what we see today is a tragic disconnect between this glorious biblical identity and the modern conception of church. For many, church is reduced to a social club, a platform for personal success, or a place of emotional experience—not a holy gathering called to proclaim and display the gospel of grace.

This disconnect is where the real crisis begins. Instead of conforming to the Word of God, many churches conform to culture, tradition, or pragmatic methods. They often reject reformation not because they've examined it biblically and found it lacking, but because they are comfortable in their current form—and any call for change is seen as a threat, not a help.

In many cases, what prevails is not humble submission to Scripture, but a mindset of contention and emotional experience—as if sincerity alone could sanctify error. Yet, without being reformed by the Word, there can be no true alignment with the will of Christ. Refusing to change in the light of truth is not strength—it is spiritual stubbornness.

And this is why reformation is essential. It is not a movement of man, but a return to the authority of God's Word and the centrality of the gospel. It calls us back to the Christ who builds His church (Matthew 16:18), and purifies her through the washing of the Word (Ephesians 5:26). Until churches return to this foundation, they may have form—but they will lack the power and presence of Christ, who alone defines what His true church is.

A Reformed Reflection on the Resistance to Truth in the Filipino Church

In the spiritual landscape of Filipino Christianity, the idea of change is often received with suspicion, hesitation, or even outright rejection. This is particularly true when the change being proposed is theological—especially if it questions long-cherished traditions or calls for the abandonment of popular religious practices. The truths recovered during the Reformation—such as sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, and the doctrines of grace—are not always welcomed with joy. In many cases, they are perceived as threats to unity, order, or even identity. But why is this the case? Why do so many churches fear change, even when that change is a return to the authority of Scripture and the gospel of Christ?

One of the reasons lies in the very foundation upon which many churches are built. Instead of being grounded on deep biblical convictions, a great number of churches in the Philippines were formed on the basis of

personal visions, denominational affiliations, or culturally inherited religious expressions. In these cases, the structure of the church often revolves around man—his experiences, preferences, and interpretations—rather than Christ and His Word. Thus, when biblical truth confronts such a foundation, it is viewed not as a call to faithfulness but as an attack on the church's very identity. When Christ is not truly the builder of the church, the demand for change becomes a threat rather than an opportunity for renewal.

Alongside this man-centered foundation is the fear of losing power and control. The doctrines of grace exalt the sovereignty of God and crush the pride of man. They declare that salvation is not the result of human effort or decision, but of God's mercy and electing love. Yet for many church leaders, control and influence over the people have become essential elements of leadership. Their authority is often built on personality, tradition, or emotional persuasion. A Reformed understanding of church life, however, restores authority to the Word and the Spirit—not to human charisma. Such truth shakes the systems that have long depended on performance-based religion, and it makes many uncomfortable.

Furthermore, tradition and familiarity offer a kind of safety for many Filipino congregations. The phrase "we've always done it this way" echoes from pulpits and pews alike. While traditions can serve a good purpose when rooted in biblical truth, they can also become a

dangerous substitute for Scripture. When tradition takes precedence over the Word, it becomes an idol. Returning to biblical theology requires the humility to reexamine long-held beliefs, practices, and rituals in the light of God's revealed truth. But change that challenges comfort will almost always be resisted. Yet reformation is not about inventing something new—it is about recovering what is ancient and true.

Another reason for resistance is the fear of division. Church leaders often hesitate to introduce Reformed teaching because they are concerned it will disturb the peace of the congregation. In some cases, this concern is legitimate. Reformation can cause tension. The truth always divides—light from darkness, truth from error, and sheep from goats. But peace that is maintained by avoiding doctrinal clarity is no peace at all. Unity that is not grounded in truth is fragile and superficial. Christ Himself warned that His coming would bring not peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34). Faithfulness to the truth may strain relationships, but it brings true unity in Christ and before God.

Perhaps the most overlooked reason for resistance is the widespread lack of theological training. Many pastors have been shaped by shallow teaching, emotional revivalism, or pragmatic ministry models that emphasize growth over depth. When doctrines such as total depravity, unconditional election, or justification by faith alone are introduced, they sound foreign—perhaps even

dangerous. This is not because they are unbiblical, but because they are unfamiliar. The need of the hour is not condemnation, but re-education. The Filipino church must invest in raising a new generation of pastors and teachers who are sound in doctrine, humble in character, and bold in proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

Reformation, then, is not rebellion—it is repentance. It is not a movement of pride or intellectualism, but a movement of returning to God and His Word. The Filipino church does not need more trends, programs, or strategies. What it desperately needs is a revival of truth—a return to the gospel of grace and the centrality of Christ in all things. Yes, the path of change is difficult. Yes, it may be costly. But the cost of refusing to reform is far greater. A church that hardens its heart against the truth of Scripture may retain its buildings and programs, but it will lose its power, its witness, and in time, its lampstand.

Let every faithful servant of Christ take courage: to call the church to reformation is not to destroy her, but to restore her. The fear of man must give way to the fear of God. The true church must once again cry out, Soli Deo Gloria—to God alone be the glory.

The Cost of Returning to Biblical Truth

To return to biblical truth is to choose a difficult path. It is not the way of popularity, convenience, or ease. Rather, it is a narrow road—a road that cuts through the

heart of man's pride, disrupts established traditions, and often invites misunderstanding, rejection, and isolation. Yet it is the only path that leads to true spiritual health, lasting joy, and the glory of God in the church.

In the context of the Filipino church, returning to biblical truth—especially the truths rediscovered during the Protestant Reformation—is no small matter. It requires courage, conviction, and a deep love for Christ and His Word. Many churches today have been shaped more by cultural traditions, emotional experience, or pragmatic concerns than by sound doctrine. The gospel has been reduced to motivational slogans, Christ-centered preaching replaced with man-centered advice, and worship transformed into entertainment. In such a landscape, a call to return to the authority of Scripture and the doctrines of grace feels not only countercultural—it feels threatening.

Embracing biblical truth will often lead to rejection. Those who stand for sola Scriptura, sola fide, and the sovereignty of God in salvation are sometimes accused of being arrogant or divisive. In truth, what is being rejected is not the messenger, but the message—a message that exposes human pride and elevates God's glory. In the early church, the apostles were persecuted not because they were troublemakers, but because they proclaimed a gospel that shattered the religious systems of their day. The Reformers faced the same fate, and so

will those today who dare to challenge the comfort zones of compromised Christianity.

Returning to biblical truth also requires the willingness to leave behind what is familiar. Many congregations are deeply attached to long-held traditions, emotional practices, or popular preaching styles. But fidelity to Christ often means letting go of what is merely cultural or sentimental. It means reexamining everything—our theology, our preaching, our worship, even our church structures—in light of the Word of God. This can be a painful process. It may lead to conflicts within leadership, to strained relationships, and to seasons of uncertainty. But the truth must always have the final word.

For some, the cost may even include ministry itself. There are pastors in the Philippines who, upon embracing Reformed theology, were removed from their pulpits, abandoned by their peers, and misunderstood by those they served for years. But such suffering is not in vain. It is the cost of faithfulness. Christ never promised comfort in this world; He promised a cross. And to carry that cross is to follow Him, even if it leads to rejection and loss.

There is also the hidden cost—the cost of dying to self. Returning to biblical truth is not merely about correcting others or reforming systems. It begins in the heart. It means confessing our own errors, repenting of shallow teaching, and surrendering our pride. The doctrines of

grace humble us. They remind us that salvation is not a reward for the good, but a gift for the undeserving. That Christ alone saves, sustains, and sanctifies His people. To embrace such truth is to declare that we are nothing and that He is everything.

Indeed, the cost is great. But the reward is greater. A church that returns to biblical truth may lose the applause of men, but it gains the smile of heaven. It may walk through the valley of loss, but it stands firm on the Rock that cannot be moved. It may be few in number, but it is rich in grace, strong in conviction, and filled with the presence of Christ.

The Filipino church must ask: Are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to be reformed—not according to the changing winds of culture, but according to the unchanging truth of Scripture? This is not a call to division or pride. It is a call to repentance. A call to remember who we are, what the church is, and who Christ is as its only Head.

The cost of returning to biblical truth is real. But so is the danger of remaining in error. One leads to life, the other to ruin. Let us, then, count the cost—and pay it with joy—for the glory of God and the purity of His Church.

Historical Resistance to Reformation and Its Modern Form

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"The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil"—John 3:19 (ESV).

The story of the church is not only a story of glory, revival, and truth—it is also a story of resistance. From the time of the prophets to the apostles, and down to the Reformers of the 16th century, the pattern is consistent: whenever God raises up voices to call His people back to His Word, those voices are often opposed—fiercely and painfully.

When the Protestant Reformation erupted in Europe, it was not simply a theological debate; it was a spiritual earthquake. The great doctrines of grace—sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria[11]—shook the very foundation of the religious systems that had long held sway over the people. These truths were not new inventions, but ancient truths recovered. And yet, they were met not with applause, but with persecution.

The religious leaders of the day, those who should have been the first to rejoice at the return to the gospel, were the very ones who resisted it most. Popes, councils, bishops, and priests—many of them saw the doctrines of the Reformers not as light from heaven, but as threats to their power and tradition. Martin Luther was condemned

[11] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 58–67.

as a heretic.[12] William Tyndale was burned for translating the Bible into English[13]. John Calvin was exiled more than once.[14] The history of reformation is stained with the blood of those who dared to say, "Let the Word of God speak again."

But why such hostility? Why such violence against the very truth that gives life?

Because reformation, at its core, is a threat to the pride of man and a call to the supremacy of God. It confronts our idols—whether they be religious traditions, human authority, or institutional comfort. It humbles the self-righteous and exalts the grace of God. And that is never welcomed by hearts hardened by sin.

Sadly, this resistance did not die with the Counter-Reformation. It continues in our time, only now with new faces and subtler forms. Today, many churches no longer burn reformers at the stake—but they do resist reformation with silence, ridicule, and exclusion. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives in modern pulpits. The desire to protect reputation, maintain tradition, and avoid

[12] Martin Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X in 1521 through the papal bull Decet Romanum Pontificem.

[13] David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[14] Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 4.

doctrinal conflict still blinds many to the beauty of biblical truth.

In the Filipino context, the echoes of historical resistance can be heard in many churches that dismiss Reformed theology as "too intellectual," "too foreign," or "too divisive." The gospel of grace is often reduced to emotionalism or moralism. Preaching becomes motivational therapy rather than a proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ.[15] Worship centers around personal experience rather than reverence for God's holiness.

And when someone begins to preach the doctrines of grace, to expose the shallow foundations of man-centered Christianity, the reaction is often the same as it was in the past: discomfort, suspicion, and rejection.

Yet the truth remains. God has never stopped reforming His church. The same Spirit who opened the eyes of Luther and Calvin is still opening eyes today. The Word of God is still living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). The Reformation is not merely a historical moment—it is a continuing call.

To embrace this call today is to walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. It is to value truth above popularity, Christ above culture, and Scripture above

[15] Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

tradition. It is to speak with courage even when the world prefers silence. And it is to suffer, if necessary, for the sake of the gospel—not with bitterness, but with joy.

History shows us that resistance to reformation is inevitable. But it also shows us that the truth of God is unstoppable. No tradition, no institution, no man-made system can hold back the light of His Word when He chooses to shine it again. The Reformers knew that. We must know it too.

In this age of spiritual confusion and doctrinal compromise, may the Filipino church hear once again the thunder of the Reformation cry—not as an echo from the past, but as a summons for today: "Post tenebras lux"—After darkness, light.

And with it, may the church rise in repentance, courage, and faith.

For the glory of God alone.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

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A Reformed Reflection on Spiritual Distraction in the Modern Church

In a time when activity is mistaken for vitality, and visibility is confused with faithfulness, the church faces a deeper crisis than mere doctrinal error—it suffers from a distracted heart. The issue is no longer simply about false teaching or shallow theology, but about a subtle shift of focus away from what truly matters in the life of the church.

While doctrinal precision is essential, the church must also guard itself from becoming preoccupied with secondary matters—things that, while not inherently wrong, can slowly replace the primacy of Christ and His Word. When good things take the place of the ultimate thing, the church loses her center.

The Subtle Drift: When Good Replaces Best

Today, many churches may affirm correct doctrine but have unknowingly shifted their focus to matters like ministry branding, aesthetics, community programs, or political influence. These are not evil in themselves, but when they become the defining identity of a church, they subtly displace the supremacy of Christ and the simplicity of gospel ministry.

A Reformed church can become just as distracted as any other when it places confidence in theological labels or liturgical forms rather than in the ongoing work of Christ

among His people. The call is not simply to critique error but to continually recalibrate our hearts toward the center—Christ Himself.

The Noise of Ministry Without the Stillness of Christ

In the busyness of church life, leaders can fall into the trap of doing many things for Christ while spending little time with Christ. Planning, organizing, and growing are important, but when done apart from dependence on the Spirit and delight in the Savior, they become mere religious noise. The story of Martha and Mary reminds us that the greatest priority is to sit at the feet of Jesus.

The problem is not always rebellion—it is often distraction. And distraction, over time, becomes disorientation. The heart of ministry is not productivity, but proximity to Christ.

Refocusing in an Age of Religious Clutter

In the age of digital content, social media influence, and endless religious resources, it has become harder to discern what truly matters. Not everything "Christian" is edifying. Not every popular preacher is faithful. The Filipino church must learn to test the spirits, weigh the message, and measure everything by the eternal standard of God's Word.

Reformation is not only a return to biblical truth—it is also a refusal to be shaped by the noise of modern

religion. What really matters is not that a church is seen or followed, but that it is faithful and fruitful before God.

The doctrines of grace give us a lens to see clearly in a confused age. They remind us that salvation is of the Lord, that man's greatest need is reconciliation with God, and that Christ is all. They expose distractions not only in false doctrine but in misplaced priorities. Through the lens of grace, we see that what matters is not what impresses man, but what pleases God.

The Reformed truth leads the church away from noise and toward depth, humility, and clarity. It calls us back not merely to theological systems, but to a life saturated with the gospel, submitted to Scripture, and centered on Christ.

The Only Focus Worth Keeping

What really matters is not how busy the church becomes, but whether it abides in Christ.

What really matters is not how many people attend, but whether the Word of God is treasured.

What really matters is not how loud our voice is in society, but how faithful our witness is to Christ.

Let every local church ask itself: Are we focusing on what Christ has called us to? Or have we been drawn away by many things, forgetting the one thing necessary?

In the end, the church that lasts is the church that remains rooted—not in popularity or performance—but in the unchanging gospel of God's grace.

The Danger of Being Busy but Missing Christ

In today's society, it is encouraging to witness a growing number of individuals actively engaged in proclaiming the Word of God. We see the Bible being read and preached not only within church walls, but in schools, public markets, government offices, and even in the remotest villages among tribal communities. In buses and jeepneys, it is not uncommon to hear someone boldly speaking about Scripture, offering a message to a captive audience in transit. On the surface, this movement may appear vibrant and hopeful—a clear sign that people are taking their spiritual duties seriously.

Yet as we observe more closely, there is a troubling pattern that begins to emerge. While the Word is being mentioned, the Christ of the Word is often missing. Many sermons are passionate and sincere, but noticeably absent is the clear, redemptive message of the gospel. Rarely do we hear Christ exalted as Savior, or the cross expounded as the center of God's saving work. Instead, messages are often moralistic, emotional, or centered on human effort, success, and inspiration. This raises a serious concern: what is truly motivating these efforts? Is it a burden for the lost and a love for Christ's glory? Or is it a cultural trend, a religious routine, or perhaps even a desire for self-affirmation?

The heart of the problem is not the lack of activity, but the lack of Christ in the activity. True gospel preaching must not only mention God's name, but must faithfully proclaim the person and work of Christ as the only hope for sinners. Without Him, even the most zealous efforts fall short of the true mission of the church. The growing presence of religious speech must be tested by the standard of Scripture: does it lead people to Christ, or does it merely leave them impressed by the speaker? The measure of genuine ministry is not the location or the volume of preaching—it is the presence of the crucified and risen Savior at the center of the message.

The true nature of ministry, as revealed in the life of our Lord, is not defined merely by constant activity or unceasing busyness. While diligence and labor are indeed part of the calling, ministry is not a race of endless motion. We see this clearly in the life of Christ Himself. There were moments, recorded in the Gospels, when He stepped away from the crowds and withdrew to rest. In one instance, while the disciples were laboring at sea catching fish, the Lord Jesus was found sleeping peacefully in the boat (Mark 4:38). This was not a display of indifference, but a revelation of balance—an invitation to understand that ministry flows not from burnout, but from deep communion with the Father and a purposeful heart.

The pattern of Christ's ministry was not mechanical. It was deeply relational, purposeful, and filled with

compassion. He spent time with His disciples not only in mission, but in moments of quietness and reflection. This balance between labor and rest is part of the divine rhythm that sustained His earthly ministry. The disciples were not merely trained to work hard—they were trained to work with Christ, to draw strength from Him, and to embody His heart for the lost.

Today, it is commendable to see many Christians busy in evangelism and outreach, tirelessly sharing Scripture in streets, communities, and churches. Such zeal is admirable. Yet if our labors are detached from the presence and power of Christ, they lose their eternal value. Hard work, when separated from the heart of the Savior, can easily become self-driven and empty. The ministry may appear successful on the outside, but inwardly, it may lack the true fragrance of Christ.

Ministry is not a matter of performance—it is a reflection of union with Christ. When we serve with Him, we serve with compassion, with humility, and with dependence. Our mission is not simply to do more, but to be more like Him. It is Christ's example, His love for the lost, and His submission to the will of the Father that must shape our every step in ministry. Without Him, our best efforts are but shadows. But with Him, even the smallest act of service becomes a means of grace and a reflection of His glory.

One of the subtle yet serious problems we observe among those who are tirelessly active in preaching and

sharing the Word is that they often fail to recognize the deeper spiritual implications of their own efforts. Their dedication is visible, their labor is consistent, and their passion is undeniable—but something crucial is missing. The problem is not immediately seen by their own eyes, nor is it felt by their hearts. They are so immersed in activity that they lose sight of eternity.

This is not to diminish their sincerity or hard work, but to highlight a blind spot that has eternal consequences. Many look at the ministry as a set of tasks to be completed or goals to be achieved, without grasping the weight of what is truly at stake—souls, eternity, the glory of Christ. There is often a general sense of doing something "spiritual," but very little particular understanding of the saving grace of God in Christ. Their words may speak of God, yet rarely do they proclaim the depth of human sin and the power of Christ's redeeming work. In the absence of the gospel, even the most zealous proclamation becomes hollow.

And here lies the heart of the concern: How can a blind man lead another blind man? The question is not born out of arrogance, but out of a desperate cry for discernment and truth. Jesus Himself asked this question in Luke 6:39 to expose the danger of unqualified spiritual leadership. It is possible to be surrounded by light and still be blind, to speak about God and yet miss the gospel entirely. When leaders and workers of the Word lack true understanding of Christ's redemptive

work, they may unintentionally mislead others, giving them religion without regeneration, knowledge without new birth.

I do not wish to come across as someone who quickly condemns or harshly judges others. This is not about looking down on sincere servants of the Lord. But discernment requires honesty. We evaluate not based on emotion or appearance, but by the substance of what is preached. If Christ is not central, if grace is not exalted, if repentance and faith are not called for, then no matter how active a ministry may be—it is missing the mark.

True ministry must lead people to the Savior, not simply to religious activity. And for that to happen, those who lead must first be led by the truth themselves. They must see Christ clearly before they can point others to Him. Without this, they remain blind guides—well-meaning perhaps, but dangerous nonetheless. It is not enough to speak of God. We must speak of the God who saves through Christ alone.

One of the primary reasons behind the writing of this book is to bring to light the Reformed truth for the Filipino churches—especially for those who dare to labor in ministry but do so without truly seeing the hope that is found in Christ alone. Many are sincere in their efforts. They sacrifice time, energy, and even comfort. They give everything they have, yet remain spiritually empty. Some even devote their entire lives to a cause that never leads them to the assurance of eternal life. This is

not because they lack passion, but because they lack clarity of the gospel.

Their minds are often filled with fancy and shallow things—emotional experiences, man-centered messages, traditions passed down without question, and teachings that stir the feelings but do not confront the heart with the truth of sin and the necessity of grace. Everything becomes a form without substance—a shell that looks alive, but is hollow within. In such a setting, even the busiest church can become a place of spiritual famine.

What becomes even more dangerous is when these individuals join together in what appears to be unity, convinced that they are on the right track. They gather around human ideas, not divine revelation; they proclaim moral uplift, not the cross of Christ. The more they multiply in number and influence, the more painful it becomes to watch. There is a growing crowd—but a shrinking gospel. There is religious excitement—but little knowledge of the righteousness that comes by faith.

It grieves my heart deeply. It is not a grief of pride or superiority, but a burdened sorrow for people who are trying to climb the mountain of God by their own strength, not knowing that the only way up is through the narrow road of grace. I see them run with such zeal—but in the wrong direction. I see them speak boldly—but without Christ at the center. And I tremble at the thought that many are dying in ministry, yet never truly possessing the hope of the second life to come.

That is why this book exists—not to criticize from a distance, but to call the Filipino church back to the unshakable foundation of the gospel. It is a call to return to the truths recovered in the Reformation, truths that anchor the soul in the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. Without these, our churches may be full, but our people will remain lost. This is not just about theology—it is about life and death, truth and error, eternity and the glory of God.

Biblical Priorities for Worship, Preaching, and Mission

The Reformation recovered and emphasized a vital principle regarding worship known as the Regulative Principle of Worship.[16] This principle teaches that everything we do in worship must be explicitly commanded or clearly implied by the Word of God. In other words, the very intention and design of true worship is to glorify God in a manner that He Himself has prescribed in Scripture—not according to human preference, innovation, or tradition.

[16] The Regulative Principle of Worship teaches that only what is expressly commanded in Scripture is permissible in corporate worship. This principle stands in contrast to the Normative Principle, which allows any practice not explicitly forbidden by Scripture. Reformed theologians such as John Calvin strongly upheld the regulative approach, asserting that God alone has the authority to determine how He is to be worshiped. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 10.

This regulative approach reminds us that worship is not an arena for creative expression or cultural accommodation, but an act of humble obedience to God's revealed will. It is not up to us to determine what pleases God in worship—He has already told us in His Word. To go beyond what Scripture commands is not just unnecessary; it is presumptuous and offensive to a holy God.

The same principle applies not only to worship, but also to preaching and mission. These three—worship, preaching, and the mission of the church—are sacred mandates entrusted to us by God. If we invent our own patterns, methods, or messages that do not align with biblical instruction, we are not only being unfaithful; we are violating the divine order established by the Lord Himself. These are not ministries we own, but responsibilities we steward in reverence.

Therefore, we must be careful not to manipulate or control these sacred activities according to personal feelings, popular trends, or emotional impulses. Instead, out of deep reverence, holy fear, and sincere love for God, we must conduct these matters with objective submission to His Word, not with subjective ideas or man-made standards.

When worship, preaching, and mission are carried out in the fear of God and according to His Word, they become acceptable, God-glorifying, and spiritually fruitful. But when we distort them or reshape them based on what we

think will "work" or attract people, we may still use the name of Christ but fail to honor the Christ of Scripture. True worship must always ask: "Is this biblical?" before asking "Is this effective?"

Let us then remember: worship is not about pleasing men—it is about honoring God. And God is most honored when He is worshiped in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24), according to His revelation, not human imagination.

If we remain committed to the Regulative Principle of Worship, we are not merely preserving a tradition—we are safeguarding the purity and power of the church's witness. This principle ensures that every message proclaimed from the pulpit is centered on Christ, not on man-centered stories, philosophies, or moralism. It assures us that every movement, decision, and ministry of the church is done for the glory of God, not for the applause of men or the promotion of institutional success.

By faithfully upholding this biblical principle, we are also guiding God's people to walk in obedience, and we help them to cultivate a mindset shaped not by trends but by truth. It becomes our way of securing the church's true identity before God—as the body of Christ, separated from the world, and submitted to His Lordship.

Today, many churches—even those that outwardly bear the name of Christ—have tragically departed from this

path. Heretical groups, while still using Christian language and even invoking the name of Jesus, pursue growth and success not for God's glory, but for personal aspiration and worldly acclaim. This is also sadly evident in many so-called evangelical churches, where the priority has shifted from truth to numbers, from faithfulness to relevance, from doctrine to entertainment.

But true Christianity is not measured by size or popularity. It is marked by faithfulness to Christ and conformity to His Word. To bear the name of Christ is to follow the biblical principles He gave, and to remain intact to His commands. A church may grow in visibility, influence, or wealth, but if it loses Christ at the center, it has lost everything.

Therefore, let us hold fast to the principles of biblical worship, knowing that only by doing so can we be confident that our worship is acceptable, our preaching is faithful, our mission is fruitful, and our identity as Christ's church is secure.

As the apostle Paul exhorted Timothy: "Guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Timothy 1:14). And as Jude reminds us: "Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Let the church never drift from the Word—because once we abandon God's rule in worship, we also begin to abandon Christ Himself.

The Dangers of Man- Made Invention

The dangers of allowing man-made inventions in worship are not just unfortunate—they are tragically devastating and spiritually destructive. When the church abandons the clear, scriptural guidance on how God must be worshiped, it opens the door to confusion, deception, and emotional manipulation. In our day, various unbiblical practices have crept into many congregations, clothed in the guise of spirituality but devoid of true reverence and order.

Some worship gatherings now go far beyond what Scripture allows, as if attempting to reach the heavens through sensational experiences. Practices such as so-called "slaying in the Spirit," uncontrollable laughter (termed "holy laughter"), intense shouting, frenzied emotional displays, fanciful and vague prophesying, and indistinguishable speaking in tongues are often celebrated. These spectacles, however, fail to cultivate sanctity and awe in the hearts of the worshipers. Instead, they create an atmosphere of confusion and sensationalism rather than solemn, Christ-centered worship.

Ministers in such settings often behave less like shepherds of God's flock and more like stage magicians, theatrically extending their hands and expecting people to fall to the ground as if by some mystical force. This is presented as a manifestation of the Spirit, but in reality, it undermines the true work of the Holy Spirit who

convicts, regenerates, sanctifies, and leads God's people into truth—not theatrics.

True worship must not be governed by what excites the crowd or moves the flesh, but by what God Himself has commanded in His Word. The regulative principle of worship stands as a safeguard against the errors of human creativity in worship, calling us back to Scripture as the sole authority.[17] When the worship of God becomes a playground for emotion-driven novelties, it ceases to reflect the holy character of the God whom we claim to serve.

In the book of Hank Hanegraaff, Christianity in Crisis, it is demonstrated how a group of religious movements has completely turned away from the true way of worship.

Instead of adhering to biblical mandates, many have adopted forms of worship driven by emotionalism, cultural trends, and personal experiences. Hanegraaff highlights how these groups, while still using the name of Christ, have departed from the sound doctrine and God-centered focus that once marked authentic Christianity. he said that "The church is in horrifying danger."[18]

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[17] The regulative principle of worship asserts that only what is expressly commanded in Scripture is permitted in worship. This principle, emphasized during the Reformation and articulated in documents such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chapter 21), protects the sanctity of worship by guarding it against human innovations and emotionalism that deviate from God's revealed will.

[18] Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (USA: Harvest House,1993), 10.

At the heart of this deviation is the abandonment of what the Reformers called the Regulative Principle of Worship—the belief that only what is commanded in Scripture is permissible in worship. This principle upholds the holiness of God, the sufficiency of His Word, and the centrality of Christ in all elements of the gathered assembly. The failure to observe this principle has resulted in worship that is no longer Christ-exalting but man-centered, often treating worship as a form of entertainment rather than reverence before a holy God.

Instead of the reading and preaching of Scripture, prayer, singing of psalms and hymns, and the right administration of the sacraments, many churches now fill their services with dramatic performances, unbiblical rituals, and sensational experiences. The consequence is tragic: worship becomes a tool for self-gratification rather than a response to the majesty and mercy of God.

Hanegraaff warns that when the church allows man-made innovations to dictate how we approach God, we not only distort the character of true worship but also mislead souls who hunger for the truth. The crisis he points out is not merely about form—it is about faithfulness to Christ, who alone is worthy of our worship, and who must be at the center of all we say and do in the church.

In the book The Agony of Deceit, edited by Michael Horton, he clearly exposes how the truth of God's Word is being twisted by several prominent televangelists.

This book is a collection of essays written by respected theologians and Christian leaders, warning the church about the dangerous doctrines being promoted by popular TV preachers. Horton and the other contributors argue that many of these preachers have replaced the biblical gospel with a message centered on prosperity, emotionalism, and self-glorification.

Instead of calling people to repentance and faith in Christ, these televangelists promote a "health and wealth" gospel that appeals to human desires. They misuse Scripture, take verses out of context, and teach doctrines that are more aligned with secular success than with the cross of Christ. Horton warns that these distortions are not simply theological errors—they are spiritual deceptions that can lead people away from the true Christ.

The book is a strong call for the church to return to the authority of God's Word and to center every sermon, teaching, and ministry on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It urges pastors and believers alike to be discerning and to measure every message against the truth of Scripture. As Horton makes clear, faithfulness to God requires us to reject teachings that twist the gospel, no matter how popular or emotionally appealing they may seem.[19]

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[19] Michael S. Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 25.

What the church desperately needs today are people with a deep and unwavering passion for the truth—people who do not seek to exalt themselves, but Christ alone. We are not in need of eloquent performers or persuasive personalities, but of humble servants whose desire is to proclaim the gospel faithfully and clearly. We must admit that the truth of God cannot be truly perceived by those whose hearts remain closed, for spiritual understanding is ultimately a gift of divine grace. As the Scriptures declare, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God… and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Our hope in writing this work is to lay bare the substance of the gospel in such a way that, by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, conviction may come upon the hearts of those who read. It is our earnest prayer that before the end of their lives comes, they may still hear the truth and be pierced by it—that they may come to repentance and saving faith in Christ. We do not presume to convert anyone by our words alone, but we trust that God may use them as instruments for awakening and transformation.

Let the church, therefore, return to the biblical pattern of worship. Let us remember that God is not glorified by sincerity alone, but by obedience to His revealed will. Worship is not about what feels meaningful to us, but

what is acceptable to Him. The call is urgent—not merely to reform our external practices, but to reclaim the true heart of worship: glorifying God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Henry Van Til, in his insightful book The Calvinistic Concept of Culture, argues that the true value of the gospel remains, even when it is cloaked in the various expressions of human culture. While culture may shape the form, it must never distort the content. Van Til reminds us that biblical truth transcends cultural boundaries, and that the message of Christ must never be compromised to accommodate the trends of any age. It is Christ—not culture—who defines our worship, our message, and our mission.

He pointed out that one of the problems facing God's people today is that while every pagan religion has developed its own unique cultural expression—and even medieval Christianity once shaped its own cultural form—modern humanism has now brought about a new kind of paganism. As a result, Christianity has lost its influence over the cultural media and is no longer the driving force behind the cultural direction of the Western world.[20]

[20] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), 45.

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Calling the Church Back to Its True Center: Christ Alone

Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). These words are not merely a reminder of human weakness, but a declaration of our absolute dependence on Christ for all things—especially in the work of salvation and the transformation of the world. Christ is not a mere religious figure or moral teacher; He is the very source of life, truth, and peace. Apart from Him, every effort—whether in religion, culture, or society—will ultimately prove fruitless.

Christ did not come to create division or confusion. He came to unite people in the truth, particularly in the knowledge of Himself. The divisions we see in the world today—across religions, ideologies, and even within so-called Christianity—are not the result of Christ's coming, but of human ignorance and rebellion against Him. If the world truly understood who Jesus is and embraced Him as the Messiah, many of the conflicts that plague our societies would vanish. For Christ is not the author of confusion but of peace (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33).

This highlights the deep importance of presenting Christ not only in the church but in the wider context of the world and religion. He is not just the Savior of individual souls; He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), the One through whom true reconciliation with God and with one another is made possible. Jesus Himself declared, "Peace

I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). This peace is not political or superficial—it is spiritual peace that calms the conscience, heals the soul, and reconciles us to God.

Therefore, the ultimate aim of our unceasing labor in the gospel is not personal recognition or religious achievement, but that men and women may come to know Christ and receive this peace that only He can give. No matter how noble human efforts may appear, only Christ can bring lasting peace—both within the heart and across the world.

In his book Providence, John Piper explains that God has the sovereign authority and ability to turn hostility into peace. It is entirely within His divine prerogative to change the hearts of our enemies, transforming their hatred into peace according to His perfect timing. Both the attitudes of the heart and the actions of the mouth and hands are under the influence and control of God's providential will.[21]

It is our sincere prayer that spiritual peace—true, lasting peace that comes only from God—may graciously come upon those who are currently holding to a different gospel, one that is tragically far from the true gospel of Christ.

[21] John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton IL.; Crossway,2020), 390.

There are many today who are zealous in their faith, yet misguided in their doctrine, proclaiming messages that appear spiritual but lack the saving power of the cross. As Paul warned in Galatians 1:6–7, they preach "another gospel," which is not really another, but a distortion of the gospel of Christ.

We do not desire to condemn them, but to plead for them. We long that the Holy Spirit may convict them of the truth, open their eyes to the sufficiency of Christ's finished work, and lead them into the glorious liberty of the gospel. For only the true gospel—rooted in grace, centered on Christ, and revealed in Scripture—can bring peace to the soul, cleanse the conscience, and reconcile man to God.

Until then, we will continue to preach and to pray—not with pride, but with deep longing—that those who are now blinded by false gospels may be awakened by the light of God's truth and brought into the joy and peace that only Christ can give.

We earnestly long to witness the day when certain evangelical groups, who may have strayed into man-centered ideologies or superficial worship, would humbly return to the sufficiency and authority of biblical truth. Our prayer is that they would wholeheartedly embrace the biblical principles—not for tradition's sake, but as a sincere act of submission to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture.

For in doing so, they will become faithful stewards of the truth, and the people under their care may finally encounter the true light that pierces through the darkness of error, confusion, and man-made religion. We live in a generation that is spiritually clouded—where religious activity often masks the absence of the gospel.

Therefore, the need is urgent. We do not seek mere reformation of style or structure, but a return to Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, Scripture-driven ministry. Only then can the truth be proclaimed clearly and powerfully—truth that alone can lead souls out of darkness and into the glorious light of God's saving grace.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

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Why am I so emphatic in preaching Christ? Why do I persist in declaring His name without reservation or apology?

There is only one answer that fully explains my unwavering conviction—even if it costs me everything: Christ is all in all (Colossians 3:11). That single truth shapes the very core of my calling and ministry. Everything else—every sermon, every doctrine, every work, every act of devotion—must turn to Christ. For in Him alone are found all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3).

To proclaim this is not without consequence. Such a Christ-centered message, when preached faithfully, will inevitably provoke tension. It may create conflict among those who want religion without the real Christ, and it may even cause division among those who have built their faith on traditions, personalities, or emotions rather than on the person and finished work of Jesus.

But this is the cost of truth. Christ must be seen and glorified in every sphere of life—whether in the home, in society, or in the marketplace. And above all, in the religious world, where many false hopes are presented in His name, He must be the very heart of preaching. No sermon is truly biblical unless it magnifies the Savior. No pulpit is truly faithful unless it points the people to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

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He is the center. He is the source. He is the goal. And He alone must be lifted up, for He Himself said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

The Eclipse of Christ in Modern Sermons

Let me speak plainly and without apology: What is our true reason for preaching Sunday after Sunday?

What is the highest and holiest motivation that should drive every message we proclaim from the pulpit?

Let us be honest—preparing a sermon is not easy. It demands time, energy, discipline, and above all, a heart soaked in prayer. It requires careful study of the Word, deep meditation, and a humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit. A faithful preacher does not simply craft a message—he waits upon God, seeking not just information but a divine word that speaks with authority, conviction, and life.

Yet, in our present day, we face a concerning trend. The sacred labor of sermon preparation has been cheapened. For many, preaching has become just another task—easily solved by a few clicks on the internet. Sermons are copied and pasted, borrowed without brokenness, delivered without discernment. There is little or no sense of urgency to exalt Christ or proclaim His glory with fear and trembling. To lift Him up so

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clearly, so powerfully, so faithfully, that souls are drawn to Him, convicted of sin, and comforted by grace.

Every preacher must ask: If not, then we have failed—not just in skill, but in purpose.

Let the pulpits of our churches once again burn with messages that are Christ-centered, cross-focused, and Spirit-empowered. Let us reject convenience and return to consecration. The church does not need more clever words—it needs the living Word preached with holy fire.

Hundreds of times I have said it: the gospel has been distorted. And yet, many preach without any sense of guilt or trembling before God. Their motivation, though perhaps well-intentioned on the surface, is rooted in the desire to uplift people—not by the power of Christ crucified, but through clever words of human wisdom, motivational slogans, and practical advice. This shift has resulted in sermons that are no longer centered on Christ but on man.

Jesus Christ has been forgotten. He is often buried beneath layers of self-help principles, psychological insights, and emotional affirmations. While the message may sound encouraging, the Person of Christ—His work, His glory, His cross—is tragically obscured. He is not central. He is not exalted. He is not preached.

In many pulpits today, if you were to examine a 45-minute sermon, you would most likely find that

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almost every minute is spent talking about the needs, dreams, and problems of man. The message is shaped to make people feel better about themselves, rather than to confront them with the holiness of God, the depth of their sin, and the sufficiency of Christ. Lifting Christ is no longer intentional—it has become accidental, or worse, optional.

This is not just a small oversight—it is a dangerous departure from the apostolic pattern. The early church "preached Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), but today's messages are often void of the very gospel that saves. What remains is a Christless Christianity, a crossless comfort, and a man-centered religion that neither convicts nor converts.

The Distinction of True Christianity

This is what sets biblical Christianity apart from all other religions in the world: it is not man-made, man-driven, or man-sustained. Christianity is not the result of human reasoning or tradition, nor is it centered on man's wisdom or experience. It is a divine revelation, grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

However, when our Christianity is shaped more by human culture than by divine truth, it ceases to be true Christianity. When the church begins to follow the leadership of man instead of the lordship of Christ, it

becomes nothing more than a religious system, no different from the world's many man-made religions. Its language may still mention Christ, but its heart is far from Him.

This danger is not new. Even during the time of the early church, various sects began to emerge, distorting the gospel and denying essential truths about Christ. One such group was the Gnostics. The Gnostics taught that secret knowledge (gnosis) was the path to salvation, not the grace of God through Christ. They separated the spiritual from the material, claiming that all flesh was inherently evil.

Because of this belief, they denied the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. According to their view, since Christ possessed a physical body, He could not have been without sin—because, in their doctrine, all flesh is automatically under the power of sin. This heresy directly attacked the incarnation of Christ, His sinless life, and ultimately the sufficiency of His atoning sacrifice.

But Scripture is clear: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us… full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "He was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Such errors remind us that any distortion of the identity of Christ—whether in His nature, person, or

work—strikes at the very heart of the gospel. The purity of Christian doctrine must be preserved, not according to man's thoughts or opinions, but according to God's revealed truth in Scripture. For once we redefine Christ, we redefine Christianity—and what remains is no longer the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The Distinctive Life of the Believer

True Christianity is not only distinguished by doctrine—it is also marked by a distinct way of life. Believers in Christ are set apart not merely by what they believe, but by how they live. The Spirit of God works within us, making us deeply aware of sin and more sensitive to the voice and leading of the Spirit. This sensitivity is not natural—it is a fruit of regeneration. The world may see sin as normal, but the believer grieves over it. Our new nature causes us to tremble at disobedience and hunger for righteousness.

We are no longer living according to the flesh or the pattern of this world. Instead, our lives are being shaped by our daily submission to Christ, whom we confess not only as Savior but also as Lord. It is this submission that defines the path of our life. We live to please Him, to walk in His will, and to reflect His character in every area of our existence. This is not about outward behavior alone, but about inward transformation.

Morality, then, is not our primary pursuit, but a byproduct of a deeper reality—spiritual life in union

with Christ. When we walk in the Spirit, morality naturally follows. Holiness becomes the overflow of a heart that is in tune with God. It is not external rule-keeping that defines the Christian life, but internal communion with the Lord.

Our focus is not on trying to appear good before others, but on growing deeper in spirituality—knowing God, loving Christ, and being led by the Spirit. This is the primary aim of the Christian life: to walk with God in humble obedience and joyful surrender. When our lives are rooted in this kind of fellowship with the Lord, everything else—our conduct, our decisions, our words—becomes pleasing to Him.

As the Apostle Paul said, "So we make it our goal to please Him—whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Therefore, the truly good life is not defined by worldly success or moral reputation, but by a life lived in the Lord. And when we live in Him and for Him, we can have the blessed assurance that our lives are acceptable and pleasing in His sight.

Signs of a Christ-Centered Church

I once heard a faithful preacher say, "Make sure that when you read the Scripture, you see Christ up there." That simple statement left a deep impact on me—and it captures the very heart of how we must approach the

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Bible. Every page of the Holy Scriptures, though written across different generations, languages, and literary styles, ultimately speaks of one central Person—Jesus Christ. His name may not be printed explicitly in every verse, but His presence, His work, and His glory are woven into the fabric of the entire biblical story.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is not primarily a manual for self-help, moral improvement, or emotional comfort. It is the unfolding story of God's redemptive plan, and that plan finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself testified to this when He said to the Jews.

This should transform the way we read the Bible. We do not come to the Word of God merely to find ourselves, or to extract quick solutions to our problems. While God graciously ministers to our needs through His Word, our highest priority is to see Christ—His love, His obedience, His cross, His resurrection, and His reign. The Scriptures are a divine revelation that leads us not inward to self, but upward to Christ.

The Bible was given so that we might come to know the heart of God, and the heart of God is revealed most fully in His Son.

Let us then be more diligent and reverent in our reading of the Word. Let us open the Bible with a holy expectation—not merely to learn doctrines, or to feel inspired, but to meet Christ on every page. From the

sacrifices of Leviticus to the Psalms of David, from the promises of the prophets to the parables of Jesus—He is there.

This is the manner in which God has revealed Himself to us. This is how He has chosen to demonstrate His grace, His justice, and His love: through His Word centered in His Son.

May every time we open the Scriptures be an act of worship, a pursuit of Christ, and a deepening of our union with Him. Let us not settle for surface reading or shallow application. Let us, with open eyes and open hearts, search the Scriptures—and see Jesus there.

"And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light" (Matthew 17:2).

"Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him'" (Matthew 17:5).

The Transfiguration of Christ is one of the most awe-inspiring moments in the Gospel narratives. In this short but glorious episode, the veil is pulled back, and the divine nature of Jesus Christ is revealed before the eyes of His closest disciples—Peter, James, and John. This moment was not just a mystical experience, but a divine confirmation that the Man they were following

was no ordinary teacher or prophet—He is the Son of the Living God, radiant in glory, eternal in being, and exalted in the presence of the Father.

"His face shone like the sun…"

This detail emphasizes the divine radiance of Christ. It echoes the vision of Daniel where the Son of Man is described in blazing majesty (Daniel 10:6), and it anticipates the glorious Christ in Revelation, whose face shines like the sun in full strength (Revelation 1:16). This was not borrowed light like Moses' fading glory after Mount Sinai—it was innate glory, breaking forth from within Christ Himself.

"…and His clothes became white as light."

This symbolizes purity, holiness, and the unapproachable light of God (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16). In the Transfiguration, the humanity of Christ was not removed, but His divinity broke through, affirming that He is both fully God and fully Man, united in one glorious Person.

Then, in verse 5, something even more profound happens:

"A bright cloud overshadowed them…"

This is not just any cloud—it is the Shekinah glory—the visible manifestation of God's presence, just as in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. God

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Himself descends to affirm and exalt His Son before the disciples.

And then comes the divine voice:

"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

This declaration echoes the voice from Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17), but now, God adds an imperative:

"Listen to Him."

This is not a suggestion—it is a command from the Father to the world. Christ is not just one voice among many. He is the Final Word of God (Hebrews 1:1–2). The Father testifies that Christ alone holds the authority to teach, to reveal, and to save. To truly listen to Jesus is to submit to His Lordship, obey His Word, and behold His glory.

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What Does This Mean for Us Today?

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Jesus is exalted in divine glory—He is more than a moral teacher; He is the radiance of the Father's glory. The Transfiguration reminds us that the path of the cross (which Jesus will soon take) is not defeat, but glory. The command "Listen to Him" is a call for every Christian to fix our eyes on Christ and submit our hearts to His Word.

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."'

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, "this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:32–36, ESV).

This is the climax of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost—the day the Holy Spirit was poured out and the New Testament church was born. In the midst of supernatural signs and great spiritual awakening, Peter does not focus on emotionalism, self-improvement, or mystical experience. His message is centered on one Person: Jesus Christ.

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He proclaims the crucified and risen Christ as the fulfillment of God's eternal redemptive plan. Everything that is happening—the outpouring of the Spirit, the tongues, the conviction—is not about man, but about the glorified Christ now reigning at the right hand of God.

In the earliest recorded Christian sermon, preached by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, we are given a clear and powerful glimpse of what true gospel preaching looks like. At the very heart of this message is not a motivational speech, not a moral instruction, nor a religious tradition—it is the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Peter's bold proclamation in Acts 2:32–36 reveals to us the non-negotiable center of biblical Christianity: the crucified, risen, and exalted Christ.

Peter begins by declaring the resurrection of Jesus: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." (v.32). The resurrection is not introduced as theological speculation but as historical fact, testified by eyewitnesses. In doing this, Peter affirms that the foundation of our faith is not emotion or experience but the objective reality that Jesus conquered death. This fact is central, not optional. Remove the resurrection, and all of Christianity collapses.

But Peter doesn't stop with the resurrection. He goes further to say that Jesus is now exalted at the right hand of God (v.33). This is a declaration of Christ's enthronement. He is not merely alive—He reigns. He is seated at the place of ultimate power and authority. This

position at the Father's right hand signifies that the redemptive work of Christ is finished, accepted by God, and crowned with glory. In short, Jesus is not only our Savior; He is our Sovereign King.

Furthermore, Peter teaches that it is this exalted Christ who has now poured out the Holy Spirit, which the people are seeing and hearing (v.33). The outpouring of the Spirit is not a separate or independent event from Christ—it is an effect of His exaltation. The Spirit is not drawing attention to Himself but pointing all eyes to Christ. Here we see that true spiritual experience flows from the finished work and exalted position of Jesus. Even Pentecost is about Jesus.

To anchor his sermon in Scripture, Peter quotes Psalm 110:1, where David prophetically wrote: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" (vv.34–35). This verse, often quoted in the New Testament, affirms both the deity and authority of Christ. David, the greatest king of Israel, refers to the coming Messiah as "my Lord"—acknowledging a superior and divine figure. Peter wants his listeners to understand that Jesus is not just the son of David—He is the Lord of David.

This is a deeply confrontational and convicting statement. The very man they rejected and crucified has been exalted by God as Lord (Master) and Christ (Anointed Messiah). What they despised, heaven has crowned. What they considered shameful, God has

glorified. This is a stunning reversal—a divine vindication of Jesus and a solemn call to repentance.

Peter's sermon teaches us that the centrality of Christ is the heartbeat of true Christian preaching. Everything else flows from it. The resurrection is His triumph. The exaltation is His coronation. The Spirit is His gift. The Scripture points to Him. And the ultimate response God requires from us is this: "Listen to Him, bow before Him, and trust in Him."

In a world filled with man-centered messages, the apostolic pattern remains the same: preach Christ. Not just Christ as teacher or miracle worker—but Christ crucified, risen, exalted, and reigning. Any message that does not exalt Christ, no matter how practical or emotional it may sound, is no gospel at all.

Therefore, as we reflect on Peter's Spirit-filled sermon, may our own hearts be gripped by the same conviction: Jesus must be lifted high. Whether we preach, teach, write, or witness—let Christ be the center. Because it is only when Christ is exalted that the Spirit moves, the church is strengthened, and sinners are truly saved.

Lifting Christ High in All Things: Preaching, Music, Mission

Let us now move forward with a sincere and prayerful look at some aspects of the church's activities. In doing so, may we approach this task with teachable hearts,

open minds, and tender consciences. Evaluating the spiritual health of the church is not an act of condemnation, but of love and faithfulness. The goal is not to criticize for the sake of criticism, but to examine whether our preaching, music, and mission still align with the heart of the gospel and the glory of Christ.

Among all ministries of the church, preaching stands as the most visible and influential platform for communicating the Word of God. It has been the primary means through which God reveals His truth, convicts the heart, and brings souls into submission to the Lordship of Christ. Preaching is not merely about speaking—it is about proclaiming. It is the heralding of divine truth from heaven to earth.

In many churches today, preaching has also become the most attractive tool for motivation, information, and encouragement. It is often shaped to appeal to the modern hearer: filled with inspirational quotes, emotional stories, and practical advice. While these things are not wrong in themselves, they become dangerous when Christ is no longer at the center. Preaching may still move the crowd, but without the cross of Christ, it becomes a tool of the world, aiming only to comfort rather than to convert, to entertain rather than to edify, to affirm rather than to awaken.

If preaching is truly used as a means of conviction, transformation, and exalting the name of Jesus, then it fulfills its God-ordained purpose. The Word, when

faithfully preached, pierces the heart, brings the sinner to repentance, strengthens the saints, and magnifies the Savior. It becomes the voice of God through a frail man, declaring the riches of grace and the call to holiness.

But if preaching no longer confronts sin, no longer points sinners to the cross, and no longer lifts up the supremacy of Christ, it has lost its power. It becomes, as Paul warned, a form of godliness without power (2 Timothy 3:5). A sermon may still be eloquent, engaging, and popular, but if it is devoid of Christ, it is spiritually empty—a lifeless echo that feeds the ears but not the soul.

Therefore, it is essential that we examine carefully what is being preached in our pulpits. Are we still hearing of Christ crucified and risen? Are preachers still opening the Word to reveal the glory of God in the face of Jesus? Or have we settled for messages designed only to make people feel better, rather than to make them bow in worship?

Let us be humble enough to ask these questions—not in arrogance, but in reverent concern for the health of Christ's church. The true church must never drift from the centrality of Christ in all its ministries. Whether in preaching, music, or mission, if Jesus is not exalted, we have missed the point entirely.

A Reflection on Music and True Worship

When it comes to music in the church, I cannot deny that many songs today possess a certain beauty and power. Their melodies are moving, and their lyrics—at times—are deeply poetic and meaningful. Like many believers, I have also admired the arrangement and tone of songs that stir the emotions and lift the soul. According to many, music can create an atmosphere where the heart is "prepared" for worship. It is often said that when the music plays, the congregation becomes more open, more reverent, more surrendered. And for many, this emotional moment feels like the very essence of worship.

But while I recognize the beauty of music and its usefulness in expressing our devotion to God, I believe we must also be cautious in our understanding of its purpose. There is a subtle but critical danger in allowing music to become the foundation of our worship experience. If we believe that music prepares our hearts for worship, or worse, becomes the basis of worship itself, then we run the risk of grounding our spiritual life on emotional atmosphere rather than on theological conviction.

Worship is not a product of sound or environment. True worship begins not with melody, but with the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is not initiated by chords or harmonies, but by the inward conviction of the soul, awakened by the truth of God's Word. To rely on music as the key to worship is to unknowingly suggest that our

communion with God depends on the emotional effect of song rather than the spiritual power of the gospel. In such a case, what happens when there is no music? What happens when emotions run dry?

The Scriptures are clear: worship is a response to who God is and what He has done through Christ. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "worship God in spirit and in truth."

Notice that He does not say "in song and melody," but "in spirit and truth." This tells us that worship is a spiritual act, grounded in revealed truth, not in mood or music. While music can aid in expressing worship, it cannot create it. Only the Spirit of God can awaken a dead heart to see the worth of Christ—and only the redeemed heart can truly exalt Him.

To exalt Christ, therefore, is not the product of an emotional buildup through music, but the result of a regenerated soul beholding the glory of the Savior. Music may stir us, but only the Spirit can convict us. Music may accompany our praise, but it must never replace our affections for Christ rooted in gospel truth.

We must remember: true worship is theological before it is emotional. The exaltation of Christ is not confined to moments of musical high, but takes place every time a believer, in reverence and truth, responds to God with faith, love, and obedience. In this sense, even silence can be worship. Even weeping, praying, repenting, or

preaching—when centered on Christ—becomes an act of worship more acceptable than any well-sung song lacking spiritual depth.

Let us then use music wisely and reverently. Let our songs be filled with gospel truth and Christ-centered themes. Let our singing be an overflow—not the cause—of our worship. And above all, let us remember that the One who draws us to true worship is not the song leader, not the choir, not the melody—but the Spirit of God, exalting the Son of God, for the glory of God the Father.

Music in Worship: Insights from the Reformers

Music has always played a powerful role in the spiritual life of the church. Its ability to move the heart, stir the emotions, and unify voices makes it a potent element in public worship. However, not all music used in churches today honors the holiness of God and the centrality of Christ. That is why we must look back to the wisdom of the Reformers—men who, under the light of Scripture, reshaped the way the church viewed every element of worship, including music.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was not merely a doctrinal revolution; it was a reformation of worship. At the heart of this conviction was the regulative principle of worship, which teaches that only what God has commanded in His Word should be part of

worship.[22] This principle deeply affected how the Reformers approached the role of music in the gathered assembly.

Among the Reformers, Martin Luther stood out as one who had a high regard for music. Himself a skilled musician, Luther considered music to be a divine gift. He once said, "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."[23] Luther wrote many hymns in the German language, believing that congregational singing was essential to teaching doctrine and strengthening the faith of the church.

In contrast, John Calvin also valued music, but was more cautious. He allowed singing in worship, but insisted that the only songs to be sung were those drawn directly from Scripture—particularly the Psalms.[24] Calvin emphasized simplicity and sobriety in worship, encouraging music that served theological truth rather than human emotion. His efforts led to the development of the Genevan Psalter, a collection of metrical Psalms for congregational use.[25]

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[22] John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543), in *Tracts and Letters,* Vol. I, ed. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958),
[23] Martin Luther, cited in Paul Nettl, *Luther and Music* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 21.

[24] John Calvin, Preface to the Psalter, in *Genevan Psalter* (1543), trans. Charles Garside.

[25] Hughes Oliphant Old, Worship: *Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 109–111.

Ulrich Zwingli, though an accomplished musician himself, removed all music from public worship.[26]He feared that music might distract from the pure preaching of the Word and lead to emotional manipulation. While his approach was more radical, it reflected a shared Reformational concern: that worship be entirely shaped by Scripture and centered on God, not human aesthetics.

The Puritans, building on Calvin's legacy, maintained strict views on church music. They sang only the Psalms, usually without instruments.[27]Their commitment to biblical simplicity led them to reject man-made hymns and musical embellishments in worship, preferring what they called "the pure Word of God sung."

What can we learn from these diverse voices? First, music must always serve the truth of Scripture. Second, emotion must not be the foundation of worship—only the revealed Word and the work of the Spirit can lead to true exaltation of Christ. Third, worship must be regulated by the Word, not by cultural taste or personal creativity.

Music is a gift. But it is a gift that must be consecrated to the glory of God. If it draws attention to man, to performance, or to emotional experience without truth, it

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[26] G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 123.

[27] Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 144–145.

fails. But when it flows from hearts filled with the Word and fixed on Christ, it becomes a beautiful act of spiritual worship.

In the realm of mission, there are vital aspects that must be seriously evaluated and examined. At its heart, the work of missions is not simply about humanitarian aid or cultural engagement—it is, fundamentally, about the proclamation of the evangelion, the Good News of Jesus Christ. The core objective is to make Christ known among all nations, tribes, and tongues, declaring His redemptive work on the cross and His resurrection, which alone brings true life and reconciliation with God. This task is not merely human effort; it depends on the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring conviction, repentance, and genuine faith in the hearts of sinners.

However, we must acknowledge that much of what is called "mission" today has strayed from this original mandate. In many contexts, the gospel has been diluted, modified, or replaced altogether with a message that appeals to felt needs, personal success, or cultural values, rather than the biblical call to repentance and faith in the crucified and risen Christ. Sadly, there are missionary endeavors where the name of Jesus is mentioned, but the substance of His finished work is not preached with clarity or urgency. What was meant to be a Christ-centered proclamation has become, in some cases, a man-centered activity.

This is why it is helpful to return to how the Reformers understood the work of mission. While they did not often use the term "missions" in the modern sense, their theology laid a strong foundation for gospel proclamation. The Reformers believed that the preaching of the Word was the primary means by which God brings people to salvation (Romans 10:14–17). They emphasized that the gospel must be preached faithfully, clearly, and widely, trusting in the Spirit to awaken dead hearts. For them, the mission was not driven by methods or programs, but by obedience to Christ's command and confidence in the power of His gospel.

Moreover, their understanding of mission was deeply rooted in the sovereignty of God. They believed that God had ordained the salvation of His elect from every nation, and that He would accomplish this through the preaching of Christ crucified. The church's task was to be faithful in heralding the message, not manipulating results. Calvin, for example, saw the spread of the gospel as an outflow of God's providential plan, and he sent missionaries to places like France, Brazil, and Scotland with the clear goal of establishing churches where Christ would be honored.

In summary, true mission, from a Reformed perspective, must return to its biblical roots: Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, and gospel-driven. The goal is not just to gather converts, but to glorify God through the faithful proclamation of His Son and the building up of

His Church. Only then can we say that our mission is aligned with the Great Commission and the heart of biblical Reformation.

Admittedly, many of those who are actively involved in missions today lack a clear understanding of what true biblical mission entails. As I have emphasized before, mission becomes genuinely meaningful and faithful only when the message proclaimed centers on the sovereignty of God. Yet, it appears that a large portion of mission workers are not grounded in this foundational truth. This is not to say that one must be a trained theologian before engaging in the work of mission. However, it is essential to possess a solid grasp of certain core doctrines—beginning with the sovereignty of God, which undergirds the entire redemptive narrative of Scripture. Alongside this, there must also be a clear understanding of the total depravity of man, which reveals the desperate need for salvation; the clarity and power of God's grace, which shows the unmerited favor extended to the unworthy; and most importantly, a deep and unwavering comprehension of the redemptive work of Christ. Without these pillars, the mission easily drifts into man-centered activities that may be sincere but are disconnected from the divine mandate. True mission is not merely going, helping, or organizing events—it is proclaiming the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, through whom alone salvation is made possible.

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CHAPTER NINE

NO DEPTH, NO HOPE

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The Tragedy of Unbiblical Teaching

One of the greatest tragedies facing the church today is the spread of unbiblical teaching. It is not merely an error in information—it is a disaster of eternal consequence. When the pulpit fails to proclaim the truth of God's Word, the people of God are left spiritually malnourished, misled, and ultimately endangered.

Unbiblical teaching distorts the gospel, replaces sound doctrine with human opinions, and shifts the focus from Christ to man, from grace to works, and from truth to experience. This tragedy is not always loud or obvious—it often comes in the form of motivational speech, shallow moralism, prosperity promises, or emotional hype. It may sound sincere and even use Christian language, but if it is not rooted in Scripture, it is deadly.

1. It Produces False Converts

When people are taught a gospel that appeals to their desires rather than convicts their hearts, they may make outward professions of faith without genuine repentance. This leads to a Christianity of convenience, where Christ is received as a helper or provider but not as Lord and Savior. The result? Churches filled with people who think they are saved—but have never truly encountered the cross.

2. It Weakens the Church

Unbiblical teaching robs the church of its power. Instead of raising up strong, discerning, mature believers, it breeds spiritual infants—easily deceived, easily offended, and spiritually shallow. A church that does not feed on the whole counsel of God's Word becomes a gathering of opinions rather than a body of truth.

3. It Dishonors God

To teach falsely about God is to misrepresent His character, His purposes, and His glory. Whether it's by twisting Scripture, ignoring essential doctrines, or replacing theology with entertainment, false teaching belittles the majesty of God. It replaces reverence with relevance, and worship becomes man-centered rather than Christ-exalting.

4. It Leads People to Destruction

This is the most heartbreaking of all: souls are led astray. When the gospel is altered, the way of salvation is obscured. Instead of hearing the truth that sets them free, people are told lies that keep them in bondage. As the apostle Paul warned in Galatians 1:6–9, any other gospel is no gospel at all—and those who preach it bring judgment upon themselves.

What Must Be Done?

The only cure for this tragedy is the faithful, fearless, and Spirit-led preaching of God's Word. The church

must return to expository, Christ-centered, and doctrinally sound preaching. Teachers and pastors must tremble before the Word, not twist it to fit their agenda.

We need a generation of preachers who, like Paul, will say, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), and who, like Jeremiah, carry the fire of God's Word in their bones (Jeremiah 20:9).

The church does not need more clever ideas or cultural strategies—it needs truth. Biblical truth. Gospel truth. Christ-exalting truth.

Why Sound Doctrine Is the Root of True Hope

In an age of uncertainty, suffering, and spiritual confusion, many people are searching for hope. They seek peace of mind, assurance of salvation, and confidence about the future. But the tragedy is this: many look for hope in feelings, experiences, or man-centered teachings that cannot hold firm in the storms of life. That is why we must affirm this truth—sound doctrine is the root of true, lasting hope.

Sound doctrine simply means biblical teaching that is faithful to the original meaning and intent of God's Word. It is not dry theology or mere intellectual knowledge—it is truth revealed by God for the salvation, sanctification, and security of His people. And when believers are anchored in sound doctrine, they are rooted

in God's unchanging promises, not in shifting emotions or opinions.

1. Sound Doctrine Reveals the Character of God

True hope begins by knowing who God is. Sound doctrine teaches us that God is sovereign, holy, just, merciful, and faithful. Without this foundation, our hope rests on a false image of God—one who changes with culture or bends to our preferences. But when we know the true and living God, as revealed in Scripture, we can say with confidence: "Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). That gives us hope even when life is uncertain.

2. Sound Doctrine Declares the Sufficiency of Christ

Hope that is not centered in Christ will fail. Sound doctrine proclaims the perfect and finished work of Jesus—His substitutionary death, His victorious resurrection, and His unshakable priesthood. This is the reason we can have assurance of salvation. As Paul says in Titus 2:13, we are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." We are not hoping in ourselves, but in Christ who will never fail us.

3. Sound Doctrine Grounds Us in the Promises of God

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True hope is not wishful thinking—it is confidence rooted in God's promises. Sound doctrine teaches that God's Word is trustworthy, and that every promise in Christ is "Yes and Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Whether we face suffering, persecution, loss, or even death, we can endure with hope because God has spoken, and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

4. Sound Doctrine Guards Us from False Hopes

One of the dangers of unsound teaching is that it offers people false hope—promises of prosperity, peace, or heaven without repentance and faith. But sound doctrine confronts falsehood. It protects the flock from deception and reminds us that our hope must be grounded in truth, not in fantasy. As Hebrews 6:19 says, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." That anchor is the gospel rightly taught and truly believed.

5. Sound Doctrine Fuels Perseverance and Endurance

When trials come, what sustains a believer? It is not emotional hype or shallow teaching—it is truth. Those who are grounded in sound doctrine know that suffering is not meaningless, and that God is working all things for good (Romans 8:28). Hope grows not in comfort but in conviction—conviction that what we believe is true, and that our future is secure in Christ.

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Doctrine Is Not Dry—It Is Life-Giving

In a world filled with shallow teaching, motivational fluff, and spiritual confusion, the church must recover this truth: doctrine matters. And more than that—sound doctrine is the source of real, living, and eternal hope.

We do not preach doctrine to puff up minds, but to build up hearts—to anchor weary souls in the faithfulness of God, the grace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Sound doctrine doesn't kill hope—it produces it.

And where there is sound doctrine, there will be unshakable hope in Christ.

Offering Real Hope Through Real Truth

In a world saturated with noise, confusion, and false promises, people are desperately searching for hope—hope that is strong enough to hold them in the storm, honest enough to deal with their brokenness, and lasting enough to carry them into eternity. But here lies the great tragedy: so many are offered counterfeit hope—hope rooted in emotionalism, human wisdom, prosperity messages, or shallow positivity. This kind of

hope may inspire for a moment, but it cannot endure the weight of real suffering or the reality of sin.

The only way to offer real hope is to speak real truth.

1. Real Hope Must Be Rooted in What Is True

True hope is not fantasy. It is not mere optimism or wishful thinking. It is confidence built on what is real. As Christians, we do not encourage others to "look within themselves" or "believe in their dreams." We point them to Christ, who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Hope that is not grounded in Him is false hope, and in the end, it will collapse.

Truth is what gives hope its power. The truth about God's holiness, man's sin, Christ's redemption, and God's sovereign grace—these are not doctrines to debate only, but truths that save, sustain, and strengthen.

2. Real Truth Deals Honestly with the Human Condition

Real hope does not come by avoiding the hard truths about sin, judgment, or human depravity. It comes by facing those truths and seeing that in Christ, there is a solution. We cannot offer people true hope by telling them they are "enough" or that "everything will work out" apart from the gospel. That is sentiment, not salvation.

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Real truth tells us that we are broken beyond repair, dead in sin, and unable to save ourselves. But it also tells us that God, in His mercy, sent His Son to take our place, bear our sin, and rise again so that we may live. That is where real hope is born—in the truth of the gospel.

3. Real Truth Anchors Us in a Real Savior

At the center of real hope is not a system, a religion, or a tradition—it is a person: Jesus Christ. Real truth is not just a concept—it is Christ Himself, the Word made flesh, the One who died and rose again, the One who intercedes for us, reigns above all, and will come again. All real hope is anchored in Him.

Hebrews 6:19 says, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." What is that hope? It is Christ, our High Priest and King, who has gone before us into the presence of God.

4. Real Hope Transforms Lives

Truth is not just for the mind—it is for the heart and life. When people are taught sound doctrine and encounter the gospel, it brings not just knowledge but transformation. Real hope changes how we face suffering, how we deal with guilt, how we live day to day, and how we face death.

It's not built on hype but on hope that endures, because it is based on a Savior who never changes.

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Hope and Truth Cannot Be Separated

If we want to give people real hope, we must give them real truth. Not watered-down messages, not motivational slogans, not human philosophies—but the clear, uncompromised, Christ-centered truth of God's Word.

The church is called not to entertain, but to proclaim; not to soothe people's feelings, but to offer the only hope that saves—Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. And we do this not by hiding the truth, but by lovingly declaring it, because truth is the only soil in which real hope can grow.

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CHAPTER TEN

"TILL DEATH DO US PART" THE CHURCH'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST

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The phrase "Till death do us part" is widely recognized as part of marriage vows, expressing a solemn commitment between two individuals. Yet, beyond its use in weddings, it carries a deeper spiritual significance when applied to the church's covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. Just as marriage is a sacred vow of lifelong faithfulness, so too is the calling of the church to remain faithful to Christ and to the truth of His Word, even unto death.

In Reformed theology, the church is seen not merely as an organization but as the Bride of Christ, joined to Him in covenant love and bound by grace. This union is not built on emotionalism or cultural trends, but on the eternal foundation of the gospel. The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His blood, sanctifies her with His Word, and calls her to live in faithfulness until He returns. This means that the church must not waver in her loyalty to Christ, no matter the cost.

The history of the Reformation is filled with examples of men and women who lived and died for this kind of loyalty. John Hus, William Tyndale, and countless others were persecuted and even martyred—not for crimes, but for refusing to abandon the truth of the gospel. Their lives embodied the very heart of the vow: till death do us part. They would rather die than betray the Christ who saved them. This same spirit is what the Filipino church must recover today—not a commitment to convenience

or success, but a firm and joyful allegiance to the gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of the consequences.

Many churches today are being tempted to walk away from biblical doctrine in exchange for popularity, entertainment, and human-centered messages. Preaching is being reshaped into motivational speaking. Worship is being transformed into a performance. Mission is being driven by numbers rather than truth. But a church that compromises truth for the sake of worldly success has already broken her vow. She has become like an unfaithful spouse who forgets her first love.

Reformed truth calls us back to faithfulness—to the Word, to sound doctrine, to Christ at the center of all things. This is not about being old-fashioned or merely traditional. It is about being biblical. The church must stand firm in the gospel, not because it is easy, but because Christ is worthy. The church must preach Christ crucified, not because it attracts crowds, but because it is the power of God unto salvation. And the church must remain loyal to her Lord, even when it leads to rejection, loss, or suffering.

“Be faithful unto death,” said the Lord Jesus, “and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). This is not simply a command—it is a promise. A church that remains faithful till death will be honored in glory. A church that does not abandon Christ will never be abandoned by Christ. This is the vow we must renew in this generation: that no matter how the world changes,

no matter how unpopular sound doctrine becomes, and no matter how great the temptation to compromise, we will not depart from our Lord.

Till death do us part must become more than a romantic phrase. It must be the spiritual declaration of every true church: we will not leave Christ, we will not abandon His Word, we will not deny His gospel. We belong to Him. And by His grace, we will remain His, even unto death.

This kind of faithfulness can only happen when we possess an enormous and unwavering faith in Jesus Christ, the giver of life and the sustainer of all things. He is not only the foundation of our salvation but the very center of every true and lasting relationship. In fact, the secret to enduring and meaningful relationships lies in deep, covenantal commitment. The moment that commitment begins to waver, the relationship weakens, and eventually, it suffers. This deterioration often begins when one party grows cold or becomes unfaithful toward the other. In human relationships, this is called infidelity, and it brings about broken trust, sorrow, and separation.

In the same way, the church, which is called the Bride of Christ, is vulnerable to this same pattern when she begins to lose her exclusive love for her Lord. When the church replaces her devotion to Christ with the love of the world, or when she seeks human approval instead of divine approval, spiritual infidelity takes place. It is a subtle but dangerous drift—away from the sufficiency of

Christ, away from the authority of Scripture, and away from the gospel of grace.

Yet throughout history, we are humbled and even surprised to see that many of God's people have chosen the opposite path. Rather than betray their Lord, they have given up everything for His sake. They have forsaken comfort, wealth, reputation, even their very lives, to remain faithful to Christ. Their faith was not shallow or seasonal—it was rooted in a deep, unshakable commitment to the One who loved them and gave Himself for them. Their loyalty was not based on circumstances or feelings, but on the reality of their union with Christ.

This is what true covenant faithfulness looks like. It is not a mere emotion; it is a conviction. It is not sustained by feelings, but by faith. It is a willingness to hold on to Christ even when the world pulls in the opposite direction. And this kind of faithfulness is not reserved for spiritual heroes—it is the calling of every church and every believer who claims to belong to Jesus. If we truly believe that Christ is life, then we must also be willing to say, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). That is the kind of faith that does not part from Christ—even until death.

Throughout church history, there have been many men and women of God whose lives have powerfully demonstrated what it means to be truly

faithful to Christ. They did not merely profess their faith with words, but confirmed it through sacrifice, obedience, and unwavering commitment to the Gospel. Their lives became living testimonies of God's grace, endurance in suffering, and boldness in truth. These faithful servants spanned every generation—some were pastors who thundered the Word of God from the pulpit, others were missionaries who gave up comfort to bring the Gospel to unreached places, and still others were ordinary believers who lived out their faith quietly but powerfully.

Among them were men like the Apostle Paul, who counted all things as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8); reformers like Martin Luther, who stood firm on sola Scriptura in the face of great opposition; and preachers like Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who exalted Christ and His cross as the center of all true preaching. There were also faithful women such as Amy Carmichael, who served the orphans of India with tireless love, and Elisabeth Elliot, who returned to serve the very people who had taken the life of her husband.

These examples remind us that the Christian life is not about comfort or popularity, but about

faithfulness to Christ no matter the cost. Their legacies challenge us today: will we, too, live lives that bear witness to the worth of Christ above all?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Life Anchored in the Gospel

In an age of theological compromise and growing secularism in the church, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones stood as a resolute and fearless herald of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Born in 1899 in Wales, Lloyd-Jones gave up a promising career in medicine to answer the higher calling of preaching the Word of God. For nearly three decades, he faithfully served as the minister of Westminster Chapel in London, where he became known not for innovation or entertainment, but for bold, Christ-centered preaching.[28]

He was deeply convinced that the Gospel is not something to be modified to fit the changing moods of culture. For Lloyd-Jones, Christ was sufficient. He famously said, "I would not cross the road to listen to a man who does not preach the Gospel."[29]This was not arrogance—it was a reflection of his deep reverence for the supremacy of Christ and the urgency of the true message of salvation.

[28] Iain H. Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899–1939 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 99–105.

[29] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 75.

Lloyd-Jones was grieved by the growing influence of liberal theology and moralism in the pulpits. He rejected the idea of a Gospel that made much of man and little of Christ. For him, the human problem was sin, and the only answer was redemption through the cross and resurrection of Christ. His sermons were rich with doctrine, yet they were never cold or lifeless—they were burning with the Spirit's power and full of earnest appeal to the soul.[30]

In 1966, during a pivotal moment in evangelical history, Lloyd-Jones called for separation from churches and movements that no longer held to the truth of the Gospel.[31] This brought sharp criticism, even from fellow evangelicals such as John Stott. Yet he stood firm, believing that unity without truth was not unity at all. He would not trade doctrinal fidelity for institutional harmony. To him, the purity of the Gospel was worth every cost.

He did not aim to entertain, impress, or draw a crowd. His aim was to bring sinners face to face with the holiness of God, the depth of their sin, and the grace of Christ. He believed that true revival does not begin with

[30] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 17–21.

[31] **Ia**in H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 549–560.

emotionalism or clever programs, but with a rediscovery of the majesty of God and the power of the Gospel.[32]

When he died in 1981, Dr. Lloyd-Jones left behind not just a legacy of powerful preaching, but a clear testimony, faithfulness to Christ matters more than popularity or numbers. In a day when the pulpit is often diluted by shallow messages, his life still speaks with conviction:

"Lift up Christ. Preach His cross. Never compromise the Gospel."

The Final Days of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Finishing the Race in Christ

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones passed away peacefully on March 1, 1981, at the age of 81. In the final years of his life, he had withdrawn from public preaching due to declining health, but his faith and devotion to Christ remained undiminished. Though he no longer stood behind a pulpit, he continued to minister quietly through prayer, correspondence, and encouragement to fellow believers.

What marked the final season of his life was not fear of death, but confident rest in the sufficiency of Christ. He

[32] Iain H. Murray, D. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 549–560.

was not afraid to die. In fact, when asked by a loved one whether he feared death, he simply responded:

Shortly before his passing, he gave strict instructions to his family: "Don't pray for healing. Don't try to hold me back from the glory."

He was ready to be with his Lord. Even in his final weakness, his theology was alive—not just in his books, but in his very soul. He had spent a lifetime preaching that "the Christian is not afraid of death because death is the gateway to being with Christ," and in the end, he faced that gateway with joy and certainty.

He died quietly in his home in Ealing, London, surrounded by the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). There was no fanfare, no dramatic moment—just a man hidden in Christ, who had run the race, kept the faith, and finished well (2 Timothy 4:7).[33]

Living for Christ: A Once-in-a-Lifetime Call

Think of our lives today. Like Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who spent his entire life serving Christ and remained faithful until his final breath, we are reminded that the Christian life is not a half-hearted journey—it is a lifelong calling. Lloyd-Jones did not seek worldly recognition or comfort. He sought only one thing: to

[33] Iain H. Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 730–735.

glorify Christ in life and in death. His unwavering commitment stands as a challenge to us all: Will we also live for Christ until the end?

We live only once. This earthly life, with all its decisions, opportunities, and challenges, is a one-time experience. There are no replays, no second lifetimes, no alternate paths. Once this life is over, eternity begins. That is why this single life we have must be lived entirely and intentionally for the glory of Christ.

We cannot afford to waste our days chasing temporary dreams, material gain, or human applause. Everything this world offers will eventually fade, but what we do for Christ will remain forever (1 Corinthians 15:58). Our time, energy, and purpose should be directed toward the kingdom of God—toward preaching the Gospel, showing love, pursuing holiness, and making much of Christ.

Let us not delay. Let us not say, "I will begin tomorrow," for tomorrow is never guaranteed (James 4:14). Today is the day to surrender fully. Today is the day to begin living for Christ—not just in words, but in all that we are. Like Lloyd-Jones, may we run our race with endurance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1–2).

If we live this one life for Christ, we lose nothing—and gain everything.

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Charles H. Spurgeon: Faithful to Christ in Life and Preaching

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), known as the "Prince of Preachers," was one of the most powerful voices for Christ in the modern era. From a young age, Spurgeon showed remarkable conviction to preach the Gospel of grace with clarity, boldness, and unwavering fidelity. At the age of 16, he was already preaching, and by 19, he became the pastor of New Park Street Chapel in London—later known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Spurgeon was not interested in fame or innovation. He was deeply Christ-centered. His sermons thundered with the call to look not to man, but to the crucified and risen Lord. For Spurgeon, Christ was everything—not just the center of theology, but the very heartbeat of the Christian life. He once said, "I have nothing to preach but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."[34]

Despite growing popularity, he never softened the Gospel to please men. Instead, he remained faithful in proclaiming the whole counsel of God, even when it cost him friends, influence, and comfort. During the Downgrade Controversy in the late 1880s, Spurgeon courageously stood against the rising tide of liberal theology that was infiltrating evangelical churches.

[34] C. H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), 172.

Many abandoned him, but he remained resolute: "Complicity with error will take from the best of men the power to enter any successful protest against it."[35]

He was not only a preacher but also a sufferer. Spurgeon battled deep depression, gout, and other illnesses throughout his life. Yet, even in his pain, he held firmly to the sovereignty and sufficiency of Christ. He wrote: "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."[36]

On his deathbed in Menton, France, far from his pulpit and congregation, Spurgeon still found his hope and joy in Christ alone. His final moments were not filled with regret or fear, but with quiet rest in the Savior he had preached for over 40 years. His life ended as it was lived—rooted in Christ, shaped by grace, and spent for the glory of God.

Reformation According to Jesus

What Christ tells us about reformation cannot be separated from the deeper call to transformation. The Reformation was never meant to be merely a historical movement or a correction of doctrine alone—it was, at its heart, a call to return to Christ Himself. When Jesus

[35] C. H. Spurgeon, "The Greatest Fight in the World," in The Sword and the Trowel (April 1888).

[36] Ibid., 212.

calls His people to repentance, He is not simply asking for external change or moral improvement. He is demanding the transformation of the heart—a complete turning from self to the Savior, from man-made religion to the living and reigning Christ.

In the Gospels, Christ continually calls people to die to themselves and follow Him. This is the essence of reformation: to leave behind the false and embrace the true, to replace dead traditions with living faith, and to restore the centrality of Christ in every aspect of life and worship. True reformation is not just about reviving old truths—it is about bringing dead hearts to life through the power of the gospel.

Transformation is the fruit of genuine reformation. When Christ reforms a church, a preacher, or a soul, He does not leave them as they were. He makes them new. He purifies their worship, renews their minds, reorients their affections, and makes Himself their supreme treasure. This is not a cosmetic change but a divine resurrection. Reformation that does not lead to transformation is no reformation at all.

Christ did not come to make us more religious—He came to make us alive. And in this light, every true reformation is a cry to be made alive again in Him. The call of the Reformer is the call of Christ Himself: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). And only when hearts are truly

transformed will Christ be glorified in the Church once more.

CONCLUSION: Let the Reformation Begin Again

Dear fellow pastors and beloved churches, this is a heartfelt appeal from one servant of Christ to another. In a time marked by spiritual confusion, widespread compromise, and sermons that increasingly lack the core of the gospel, we are being called to return to the truths that once ignited the flames of the Reformation.

This call is not about controversy but about conviction—not about popularity but about purity. It is a call to examine our pulpits, to evaluate the content of our preaching, and to ask: Is Christ truly at the center? Are we proclaiming His gospel, or have we unknowingly drifted into man-centered messages?

Faithful ministry is not just about effort; it is about truth. Service to the church must be rooted in the person and work of Christ. We are not merely called to preach—we are called to preach Christ crucified. Let us not be content with shallow words that merely entertain or temporarily comfort, but may we boldly declare the truth that saves.

The Reformation is not just a historical moment—it is a living necessity. Two of its pillars, Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) and Solus Christus (Christ alone),

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remain the foundation upon which every true church must stand.

Sola Scriptura reminds us that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for faith and practice. When tradition, human opinion, emotion, or modern ideologies begin to shape our doctrines more than the Word of God, we are in danger. In this digital age where Christian content abounds but biblical depth is scarce, we must awaken the church to once again submit fully to the authority of the Word.

Solus Christus proclaims that Christ alone is our Redeemer, Mediator, and the heart of our faith. If our preaching centers on self-improvement, success, or emotional experiences rather than the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, we are not proclaiming the true gospel. What the church desperately needs is a doctrinal awakening—a return to the majesty and sufficiency of Christ in all things.

This is the hour to raise the banner of truth again. Let it begin in the pulpit. Let it begin with pastors. Let it begin with Scripture.

True reformation is not merely external—it is a deep inward renewal, beginning in the hearts of pastors and flowing into the life of the church. And this reformation must be for one great cause: the glory of God. Not for the advancement of denominations, personal recognition,

or institutional pride, but for the name of Christ to be lifted high and His people made holy.

Reformation is costly. There may be opposition. There may be loss. But remember: the glory of God is never a wasted pursuit. When we realign our lives, our preaching, and our churches with the truth of Christ, the result is a church that shines brightly in a dark and broken world.

This is the heart of reformation: to revive the church by restoring it to Christ—for the glory of God and the good of His people.

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Edgardo M. Alde is a servant of Christ who has spent over 30 years in pastoral ministry and in teaching God's Word. By God's grace, he holds a Bachelor of Ministry, Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, and Master of Divinity—credentials he has never used for personal recognition, but as tools to equip others for gospel ministry.

He has taught in seminary classrooms for almost a decade, handling subjects such as Biblical Studies, Introduction to Philosophy, and Christian Education, while helping train pastors and leaders to love sound doctrine and to faithfully handle the Scriptures. His greatest joy is to see Christ exalted and churches reformed by the truth of God's Word.

He is the author of ***Real Life in Christ: Exploring the Depths of God's Grace—A Biblical and Theological Reflection*** **and this book,** ***Reformed Truth for Filipino Churches: A Call to Biblical Faithfulness and Reformation, and Solus Christus: The Heart of True Preaching—Proclaiming Christ Alone in a Pulpit-Filled World.***

More than degrees or experience, he considers it a privilege to still be used by the Lord in this season of his life—through writing, mentoring, and pointing others to

the sufficiency of Christ and the beauty of Reformed truth. To God alone be the glory.

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GLOSSARY OF THEOLOGICAL AND REFORMED TERMS

- Atonement – Christ's sacrificial work on the cross to pay for the sins of the elect, reconciling them to God.

- Assurance – The believer's confidence in eternal salvation based on God's promises and Christ's finished work.

- Adoption – God's act of making sinners His children through union with Christ.

- Apostasy – The deliberate turning away from the faith once professed.

- Attributes of God – The perfections of God's nature, such as holiness, justice, omnipotence, and love.

- Analogical Language – The use of human terms to describe divine realities in a way we can understand.

- Biblical Authority – The belief that Scripture alone is the ultimate standard for faith and life.

- Born Again – The spiritual rebirth brought about by the Holy Spirit, giving new life to a sinner.

- Baptism – A church ordinance symbolizing union with Christ and entrance into the covenant

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community.

- Blasphemy – Speaking or acting irreverently against God's name or character.

- Body of Christ – A biblical metaphor for the church, with Christ as its head and believers as its members.

- Backsliding – A temporary decline in spiritual devotion and obedience, often marked by sin.

- Covenant – A binding relationship initiated by God with His people, marked by divine promises and obligations.

- Calvinism – A theological system emphasizing God's sovereignty in salvation, summarized in the acronym TULIP.

- Confession – A formal statement of faith outlining core biblical doctrines (e.g., Westminster Confession).

- Church Discipline – The biblical process of correcting sin within the church to preserve holiness and restore the sinner.

- Creeds – Historic affirmations of Christian belief used to teach and guard orthodoxy (e.g., Apostles' Creed).

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- Common Grace – God's non-saving kindness shown to all humanity, including unbelievers.

- Depravity (Total Depravity) – The doctrine that every aspect of human nature is corrupted by sin, making us incapable of turning to God without grace.

- Doctrine – A teaching based on Scripture that shapes what Christians believe and practice.

- Dispensation – A theological framework that views God's dealings with humanity in different historical periods; often contrasted with covenant theology.

- Divine Sovereignty – God's absolute authority and control over all creation and history.

- Double Predestination – The belief that God sovereignly elects some to salvation and others to just condemnation.

- Discipleship – The process of following Christ in obedience, growth, and maturity as His learner and servant.

- Election – God's eternal choice of certain individuals to be saved, based solely on His grace and will.

- Ecclesiology – The theological study of the church's nature, mission, and structure.

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- Exegesis – The careful interpretation of Scripture, drawing out its original intended meaning.

- Evangelism – The faithful proclamation of the gospel to bring others to saving faith in Christ.

- Eschatology – The study of last things, including Christ's return, final judgment, and the new heavens and earth.

- Effectual Calling – The irresistible and inward call of God that brings the elect to faith in Christ.

- Faith – Trust and reliance on Christ alone for salvation.

- Fallen Nature – The corrupted condition of humanity resulting from Adam's sin.

- Foreknowledge – God's eternal knowledge of all things, particularly His loving choice of the elect.

- Forgiveness – The removal of guilt and penalty of sin through the work of Christ.

- Five Solas – The foundational truths of the Reformation: Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Glory to God Alone.

- Fruit of the Spirit – The godly character traits produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer (Gal. 5:22–23).

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- Grace (Saving Grace) – God's unmerited favor shown to sinners through Christ for their salvation.

- Glorification – The final stage of salvation where believers are made perfectly holy and immortal in God's presence.

- Gospel – The good news that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again to save sinners.

- General Revelation – God's self-disclosure through creation and conscience, which reveals His existence but not the way of salvation.

- God's Sovereignty – God's supreme right and power to do all that He wills in heaven and on earth.

- Godliness – A life of reverence, obedience, and devotion to God.

- Holiness – The absolute purity and moral perfection of God, and the calling of believers to reflect His character.

- Heresy – Any teaching that contradicts the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

- Hypostatic Union – The union of Christ's divine and human natures in one Person, fully God and fully man.

- Hell – The place of eternal punishment and separation from God for the wicked and

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unrepentant.

- Humiliation of Christ – The descent of Christ from heavenly glory to suffering and death for our redemption.

- Hope (Christian) – Confident expectation of future glory based on God's promises.

- Imputation – The crediting of Christ's righteousness to the believer and the believer's sin to Christ.

- Incarnation – The act of the eternal Son of God taking on human flesh.

- Irresistible Grace – God's effectual calling that overcomes the resistance of the sinner and brings him to salvation.

- Idolatry – Worship of anything or anyone other than the one true God.

- Illumination – The work of the Holy Spirit in helping believers understand and apply Scripture.

- Image of God – The unique status of human beings created to reflect God's character and rule.

- Justification – God's declaration that a sinner is righteous based on the righteousness of Christ received by faith.

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- Judgment Day – The final day when Christ will judge all people according to their deeds.

- Jesus Christ – The second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God incarnate, Savior and Lord.

- Jehovah (YHWH) – The covenant name of God revealed in the Old Testament, often translated as "LORD."

- Joy (Spiritual) – A deep, abiding gladness in God regardless of circumstances.

- Jew and Gentile – Biblical terms for God's covenant people (Jews) and all other nations (Gentiles), both united in Christ in the New Covenant.

- Kingdom of God – The rule and reign of God through Christ, both present spiritually and future in fullness.

- Knowledge of God – The relational and covenantal understanding of God through His self-revelation.

- Koinonia – The Greek word for fellowship, referring to deep spiritual communion among believers.

- Kenosis – The self-emptying of Christ in His incarnation (Philippians 2:7).

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- Keys of the Kingdom – The authority Christ gave to the church to preach the gospel and exercise discipline.

- Kindness – A fruit of the Spirit; active compassion and generosity toward others.

- Law of God – God's moral standard as revealed in Scripture, reflecting His holiness.

- Limited Atonement – The teaching that Christ's death was intended to save only the elect (also called Particular Redemption).

- Lord's Supper – A sacrament instituted by Christ to remember His death and proclaim His return.

- Lordship of Christ – The truth that Jesus is sovereign over every area of life.

- Liturgy – The structure and elements of Christian worship.

- Love of God – God's sacrificial and faithful affection for His people, most clearly shown in the cross of Christ.

- Mediator – One who stands between God and man; Jesus Christ is the only Mediator.

- Monergism – The Reformed belief that salvation is entirely the work of God alone.

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- Mortification – The daily putting to death of sin in the life of the believer.

- Mission – The church's calling to make Christ known in all nations through the gospel.

- Mystery – A truth once hidden but now revealed in Christ (e.g., Jew and Gentile united in the church).

- Means of Grace – The ordinary channels (Word, sacraments, prayer) by which God grows His people.

- New Covenant – The covenant established by Christ's blood, fulfilling the promises of the Old Testament.

- New Birth – The work of the Spirit giving spiritual life to the dead sinner.

- Necessity of Grace – The truth that no one can be saved without the sovereign grace of God.

- Natural Revelation – See "General Revelation"; knowledge of God through nature and conscience.

- Nicene Creed – A historic Christian statement of faith that affirms the Trinity and the deity of Christ.

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- New Heavens and New Earth – The final, eternal dwelling place of the redeemed.

- Original Sin – The inherited guilt and corruption passed down from Adam to all his descendants.

- Omniscience – God's perfect and complete knowledge of all things.

- Omnipotence – God's almighty power to accomplish all His holy will.

- Omnipresence – God's ability to be fully present everywhere at all times.

- Orthodoxy – Right belief or doctrine in accordance with Scripture and historic Christianity.

- Ordination – The formal setting apart of someone for gospel ministry.

- Providence – God's continuous care, control, and purpose over all things for His glory.

- Perseverance of the Saints – The doctrine that true believers will continue in faith and will not ultimately fall away.

- Preaching – The authoritative proclamation of God's Word, central to Reformed worship.

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- Penal Substitution – The doctrine that Christ bore the penalty of sin in the place of His people.

- Propitiation – The turning away of God's wrath through the sacrifice of Christ.

- Predestination – God's eternal decree to save some and pass over others, based solely on His will.

- Quickening – An older term for regeneration, meaning to be made spiritually alive.

- Qualifications for Elders – Biblical standards for those who lead in Christ's church (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

- Quiet Time – Personal devotion and communion with God through Scripture and prayer.

- Quenching the Spirit – Resisting or suppressing the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

- Qadosh (Hebrew) – Means "holy"; a key attribute of God in the Old Testament.

- Regeneration – The new birth through the Holy Spirit, giving spiritual life to the sinner.

- Reformed Theology – A system of doctrine emphasizing God's sovereignty, covenant, and grace in salvation.

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- Repentance – Turning from sin to God with sorrow, confession, and renewed obedience.

- Redemption – Deliverance from sin and its consequences through Christ's payment.

- Righteousness of Christ – The perfect obedience of Jesus credited to the believer.

- Resurrection – The bodily rising of Christ and the future resurrection of all believers.

- Sanctification – The process by which God makes believers holy in heart and conduct.

- Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura) – The Reformation principle that the Bible alone is our final authority.

- Soli Deo Gloria – "To God alone be the glory"; all of life and salvation exists for God's glory.

- Satisfaction – Christ's fulfillment of divine justice through His atoning death.

- Sacraments – Visible signs and seals of the covenant of grace (e.g., Baptism, Lord's Supper).

- Sabbath – God's ordained day of rest and worship, rooted in creation and fulfilled in Christ.

- Trinity – One God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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- Total Depravity – The Reformed doctrine that sin affects every part of human nature.

- Theology – The study of God and all things in relation to Him, grounded in His Word.

- TULIP – Acronym summarizing the five points of Calvinism: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints.

- Typology – The interpretation of Old Testament figures or events as foreshadowing Christ.

- Temptation – Enticement to sin; believers are called to resist it by God's grace.

- Unconditional Election – God's sovereign choice of certain individuals to be saved, not based on foreseen merit or faith.

- Union with Christ – The believer's spiritual connection to Christ in His death, resurrection, and life.

- Universal Church – All true believers throughout time and place, united in Christ.

- Ungodliness – A life lived apart from reverence for God and obedience to His will.

- Understanding (Spiritual) – Illumination given by the Spirit to grasp the truths of God.

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- Unbelief – The rejection of God's truth and the refusal to trust in Christ.

- Vocation – One's calling from God, whether in ministry or secular work, to live for His glory.

- Virgin Birth – The miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary.

- Visible Church – The outward, organized body of professing Christians in the world.

- Vindication – God's public declaration of Christ's righteousness in the resurrection.

- Vicarious Atonement – Christ's substitutionary death on behalf of sinners.

- Volition – The faculty of the will; in sin, the will is bound and must be freed by grace.

- Worship – The reverent adoration of God in spirit and truth, both personally and corporately.

- Westminster Confession – A foundational Reformed confession of faith from the 17th century.

- Word of God – The Scriptures as the inspired and infallible revelation of God's will.

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- Wrath of God – God's righteous judgment against sin.

- Works Righteousness – The false belief that one can be saved through good deeds.

- Witness – The believer's testimony to the truth and power of the gospel.

  Zion – A biblical name for Jerusalem, often symbolizing God's dwelling with His people.

  Zeal – Passionate devotion to God and His glory.

  Zwingli, Ulrich – One of the leading Reformers, known for his emphasis on Scripture and church reform in Switzerland.

  Zionism (Spiritual) – In Reformed theology, a symbol of the church as God's redeemed people.

  Zebach (Hebrew) – A word for sacrifice, pointing to atonement in the Old Testament.

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